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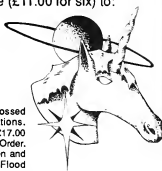
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# interzone

SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY

No 57

March 1992

## CONTENTS

### Fiction

<b>Greg Egan:</b> Before	6
<b>David Langford:</b> Blossoms That Coil and Decay	14
<b>Kathleen Ann Goonan:</b> Daydots, Inc.	21
<b>Julian Flood:</b> The Jade Pool	35
<b>Cherry Wilder:</b> Bird on a Time Branch	40
<b>Terry Boren:</b> Three Views of the Staked Plain	48
<b>Jonathan Lethem:</b> The Speckless Cathedral	57

### Features

<b>Interface:</b> Editorial & News	4
<b>Interaction:</b> Readers' Letters	5
<b>Brian Stableford:</b> History of British SF Magazines	17
<b>Nick Lowe:</b> Film Reviews	31
<b>Mike Ashley:</b> Interzone: A Bridge So Far	45
<b>Paul McAuley, Brian Stableford, etc.:</b> Book Reviews	61

### Cover by Kevin Cullen for "Before"

Published monthly.  
All material is © Interzone, 1992

ISSN 0264-3596  
Printed by KP Litho Ltd, Brighton

Trade distribution through Diamond Magazine  
Distribution Ltd., Unit 1,  
Burgess Rd., Ivyhouse Lane,  
Hastings, E. Sussex TN35 4NR  
(tel. 0424 430422)

Bookshop distribution through Central Books,  
99 Wallis Rd., London E9 5LN  
(tel. 081 896 4854)

U.S. and Canadian distribution through Worldwide  
Magazine Distributors Ltd., Unit 14 - 225 Bysham  
Park Drive, Woodstock, Ontario N4T 1P1,  
Canada (tel. 519 539 0200) - both trade  
and individual queries welcomed.



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The Unlimited Dream Company

**Address:** 217 Preston Drive,  
Brighton BN1 6FL, United  
Kingdom. All subscriptions,  
back-issue orders, general  
correspondence, books for review,  
and enquiries about advertising  
should be sent to this address.

**Subscriptions:** £26 for one year (12  
issues) in the UK. Cheques or postal  
orders should be crossed and made  
payable to Interzone. Overseas  
subscriptions are £32, payable by  
International Money Order. Pay-  
ments may also be made by Access  
or Visa card (also MasterCard or  
Eurocard): please send your card-  
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will be charged at the £ sterling  
rate.) Alternatively, U.S. subscribers  
may pay by dollar check - \$52 by  
Air Saver (accelerated surface  
mail). Lifetime subscriptions: £260  
(UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S.  
accelerated surface).

**Back-issues** are available at £2.50  
each in the UK (£2.80 each over-  
seas), postage included. (US dollar  
price: \$5 surface mail.) All issues  
are still in print except numbers 1,  
5, 7, 17 and 22. Order them from  
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# Interface

## David Pringle

Next month we celebrate our tenth anniversary. Actually, the celebration is spread over two months, starting now. This issue's articles by **Mike Ashley** and **Brian Stableford**, about the tradition of the British science-fiction magazine and *Interzone's* place therein, were originally intended for issue 58; however, we discovered that the extra wordage of fiction we have lined up for our tenth anniversary would not leave space for these two pieces – so we're bringing them to you here, a month in advance.

We're very grateful to Messrs Ashley and Stableford for their thoughtful articles (and for turning them in so early).

### Lots of Good Reading

Among many magazines we have received recently is **The New York Review of Science Fiction** number 40, December 1991. David Hartwell says in his editorial: "Let us not forget to mention that *Interzone* is currently the leading magazine in the field for book reviews. They have more and more varied review coverage than any other prozine, and the critical standards are high. U.S. magazines take notice." Sweet words of praise: thank you. The *NY Review of SF*, which is itself an excellent source of reviews and comment, is available from Dragon Press, PO Box 78, Pleasantville, NY 10570, USA (\$25 per annum inland; \$37 overseas).

Other magazines we've seen recently include **Aboriginal Science Fiction** number 29/30, the delayed double issue, which contains several letters from American and other readers commenting on last year's *Interzone/Aboriginal* "swap." Interesting. *AbSF* is edited by Charles Ryan from PO Box 2449, Woburn, MA 01888-0849, USA (\$15 for six issues inland; \$18 overseas).

And **Science Fiction Eye** number 9, November 1991, the latest issue of a highly irregular but always very welcome magazine mainly devoted to non-fiction (the surprise this time is that it contains a long article on "animal fantasy" – Richard Adams and all that stuff – from **Paul Di Filippo**, of all people). *SF Eye* is edited by Stephen P. Brown from PO Box 18539, Asheville, NC 28814, USA (\$10 for three issues inland; \$15 overseas).

I'd also like to mention **The Modern Review** number 2, Winter 1991/92. It's not a science-fiction publication, but one devoted to popular culture in all

its manifestations – films, TV, sport, fashion and so on, as well as popular writing. This issue contains a long review of C.J. Cherryh, a review of a "Godzilla" novel by Mark Jacobson, stuff on Freddy Krueger and Addams Family movies, something about the late Gene Roddenberry – and much more of marginal sf/fantasy interest. It's lively and intelligent (perhaps a bit too clever-clever for some tastes), and may appeal to many of *Interzone's* readers. The editor of *The Modern Review* is Toby Young, 6 Hopgood St., London W12 7JU (£10 for six issues inland; £14 Europe; \$35 USA).

### Fantasy Award Winners

Here, somewhat belatedly, are the winners of the **World Fantasy Awards**, announced at the World Fantasy Convention held in Tucson, Arizona, in November 1991:

Best novel: *Only Begotten Daughter* by **James Morrow** and **Thomas the Rhymer** by **Ellen Kushner** (tie)

Best novella: "Bones" by **Pat Murphy**  
Best short fiction: "A Midsummer Night's Dream" by **Neil Gaiman** & **Charles Vess**

Best collection: *The Story of the End of It All* by **Carol Emshwiller**

Best anthology: *Best New Horror* ed. **Stephen Jones** & **Ramsey Campbell**  
Best artist: **Dave McKean**

Special award, professional: **Arnie Fenner**

Special award, non-professional: *Cemetery Donce* ed. **Richard Chizmar**

Lifetime achievement award: **Ray Russell**

*Interzone* was shortlisted in the category "Special award, professional," which is pleasing for us; but we didn't win (Arnie Fenner, the winner, designs limited-edition books published by Mark Zeising). There are several British names among the winners this year – Gaiman, Jones, Campbell, McKean – and we congratulate them all, together with the other winners.

### A Season of Hearts and Bodies

It looks to be an unusually strong spring in UK sf-and-fantasy book publishing. Here are just a few of the more notable novels forthcoming in the next four or five months:

*English Music* by Peter Ackroyd (Hamish Hamilton); *Timelike Infinity* by Stephen Baxter (HarperCollins);

*Anvil of Stars* by Greg Bear (Legend); *Meridian Days* by Eric Brown (Pan); *After Silence* by Jonathan Carroll (Macdonald); *Hellburner* by C.J. Cherryh (NEL); *Red Bride* by Christopher Fowler (Macdonald); *The Unforgiven* by Stephen Gallagher (NEL); *Grunts* by Mary Gentle ("a fantasy with Attitude"; Bantam Press); *The Course of the Heort* by M. John Harrison (Gollancz); *The Very Model of a Mon* by Howard Jacobson (a Biblical fantasy about Cain; Viking); *Heort-Beost* by Tanith Lee (Headline); *Heorts, Honds & Voices* by Ian McDonald (Gollancz); *Body of Glass* by Marge Piercy (her first sf novel since *Woman on the Edge of Time*; Michael Joseph); *Small Gods* by Terry Pratchett (Gollancz); *Wos...* by Geoff Ryman (HarperCollins); and *Foustine* by Emma Tennant (a contemporary *Deal-with-the-Devil* story; Faber).

It doesn't sound like fantasy, but there's an intriguing Jack-the-Ripper novel from Hilary Bailey, *The Cry from Street to Street* (Constable). We're also promised *Leibowitz* and the *Wild Horse Woman*, a 32-years-late sequel to *A Conticle for Leibowitz* by Walter M. Miller – but we'll believe that one when we see it. Forthcoming collections and anthologies include *Memoirs of the Body* by Lisa Tuttle (Severn House); Tuttle also has a new novel, *Lost Futures*, coming out in the USA); and *In Dreams* ed. Kim Newman and Paul McAuley (Gollancz).

### The Publishing Merry-Go-Round

The news of changes in the British publishing scene comes too thick and fast for us to be able to keep up. Last issue, we reported that erstwhile sf editor **Anthony Cheetham** had been sacked as boss of the massive Random Century publishing group; but before those words even saw print we heard that he had bounced back by purchasing the much smaller firm of Weidenfeld & Nicolson Ltd. The word is that he is relaunching himself from this base, forming a "new publishing and holding company" called Orion. True to the Cheetham tradition, this will feature a science-fiction and fantasy list, and already **Deborah Beale** and her assistant **Charon Wood** have been poached away from *Century/Legend Books* to edit it. The sf imprint will possibly be called *Millennium* – which is a timely name, and ten times better than *Century*.

(David Pringle)

# Interaction

Dear Editors:

Throughout the year I have enjoyed *Interzone* immensely and I always look forward to the next issue landing on my doormat. I am certainly wary though of special editions and swaps – but I have to admit I found the Aborigine issue (IZ 47) a very good read and the artwork was most inspiring.

The non-fiction items are usually worth reading but I would rather see a wider range of books reviewed, with each one receiving a more concise assessment. The non-fiction item I most enjoy is the "Interaction" section: readers' letters help to provide a feeling of commonality with IZ readers. I would like to see the Interaction section expanded with a wider range of letters. Heated or satirical letters based around a disputable issue (especially another reader's letter) make for entertaining reading if they are well argued.

I found IZ 54 the most enjoyable of all the issues in 1991 and this is not just because the earlier issues have faded from memory. The stories were all admirable (I rarely enjoy every story in a particular issue) and the artwork and non-fiction items were all praiseworthy. The "Cyberpunk: A Schematic Guide" was both informative and intriguing. Linking sf to other areas such as film, music and philosophy by using the theme of cyberpunk I found especially entertaining; also this helps to provide a trelis for science-fiction themes to link up with other areas of creative expression and culture. I would very much like to see more articles in this vein appearing in the magazine, drawing out recurring themes in sf and relating these to similar themes in such areas as music, science and technology, politics, society, the arts and popular culture. Examples of recurring themes could be:

UTOPIAS; HYPER-EXPANSIONISM v ECOLOGISM; APOCALYPTICAL AND MILLENNIAL THEMES; CAPITALISM AND MATERIALISM; WAR AND VIOLENCE; EXISTENTIALISM AND INNER SPACE; POSTMODERNISM; TECHNO-PHOBIA v SCIENCE AS SAVIOUR; EXPLORATION AND COLONISATION; FRANKENSTEIN'S CREATION 1818-1992

I would like to see short critiques and analyses of current trends in sf and how these fit in with the "zeitgeist" of western society in the 1990s.

Please can we have more stories in *Interzone* by British women writers. Fresh, colourful and perceptive women's fiction is a real joy to read and it is a pity that women do not feature more prominently in the sf field. Female authors often display a special skill in delineating character, motives

and the nuances of human interactions; a sensitivity which is sadly lost to many male sf authors. Sadly though, women's stories are often bogged down with the concerns of feminism and family, sex and babies or men and marriage: It is apparently difficult for women to lift these important areas of female experience away from the mundane, prosaic and workaday plane up to an imaginative level of poetic beauty and fantasy which is needed to provide the magical "sense of wonder" so important to sf. These difficulties were evident I felt in some of the fiction in *Interzone* over the past year.

I hope IZ will continue strongly through 1992 and beyond and will be able to increase its readership through an imaginative marketing policy without in any way sacrificing or renouncing any of its good qualities. I feel that the short stories are the vital mainstay of the publication and there should be at least six of these in a month. Short story magazines are very difficult to come by in this country and it is vital that British sf has a firm, reputable platform and outlet. It is essential that *Interzone* keeps going and reaches out to an ever-growing audience as each year goes by.

**Damian Parkinson**  
Chorley, Lancashire

Dear Editors:

You don't need me to tell you, but I will anyway, that Judith Johnstone (IZ 54 letters) is a miserable so-and-so. She says she cannot finance subscribing to both *Interzone* and the Society of Authors because IZ prints too many "downbeat" stories.

It's a poor do when an aspiring author (as I presume she must be) decides not to support one of the only national magazines publishing sf simply because some of the stories aren't as happy as she would like. The best way, surely, of changing or affecting the contents of the magazine would be to write something good enough to get published by it.

And why all this moaning about "downbeat" stories anyway? She's not the first to whine about this. Just what's wrong with them? "Graphic descriptions of dismemberment or the hopelessness of existence interspersed with cheerless fucking," Judith Johnstone bitches. Perhaps excluding the dismemberment bit, it may be that this strikes too close to home for her, and she'd prefer the fantasy of the inspirational, with meaningful sex.

Well that's not for me, nor for most of your uncomplaining subscribers either, I'll bet. The past notion of a "happy issue" to assuage these wimps who can't enjoy anything unless it's full of sunshine and hope, is repellent. You do well to shy away from it. What would come next? A "really happy issue" with Mr Smiley printed on the

top of each page? Noooooooo.

Keep it up and 'sod the happy brigade.

But what's this? Two funny stories in issue 54. This will not do, I like a laugh with the rest of them but sf is a serious business. Now promise you won't print any more. Go on, promise.

**John M. Rimmer**  
Merseyside

**Editor:** Ha ha! No promises.

Dear Editors:

Many thanks for IZ 54. By far the best story was "Self-Sacrifice" by "Francis Amery" (J.G. Ballard??); the premise that AIDS is an artificial plague is a bit shaky, given evidence that it was around in Africa as early as the 50s, but, given that premise, the story as a study of a mind in disintegration is splendid.

"The Birth of Sons" is probably second-best: Sharon M. Hall faces a female-less future without the paranoia that sometimes accompanies such speculation. Men are shown to be people, essentially nonviolent and co-operative – just like women. This has the effect of making the story itself sorrowful rather than aggressively feminist (as it could easily have been). A well-constructed plot and a realistic ending help, too.

"Encounter of Another Kind" and "Bad Timing" were splendid jokes, particularly the former; "Enola" was too long, too unfleshed and insufficiently original to make up for these defects. David Brin has a fascinating idea, but, like his recent novel *Earth*, "What Continues, What Fails..." is rather a muddle, full of inserted science (mostly redundant to the well-informed reader) and flat characters. I don't really feel the special human energy that makes *Isola's* DNA so much in demand – I just hear it described.

I hate to rub it in again, but the illos are still mostly fairly bad. Never fear – the competition is in much the same state. Obviously no-one can draw; I wish I could, then I'd offer my services!  
**P.J.L. Hinder**  
Bristol

**Editor:** No, "Self-Sacrifice" certainly wasn't written by J.G. Ballard. Unfortunately, the author concerned wishes his or her identity to be kept secret for the time being, so you'll have to keep guessing. (One of our readers did come up with the correct answer, though, and has received a prize of two books; a couple of others have also guessed correctly since.)

Dear Editors:

Recently, by a lucky chance, I read one issue of your magazine *Interzone* and liked it very much. I am a fan of sf, and,

Continued on page 60



# BEFORE

## Greg Egan

**T**he observation bay of the Hotel Tereshkova faces Earth. The dome consists of two concentric plastic shells, with a metre of heavy water between them, but the optical properties of the plastic have been tailored to render the combination almost invisible, and when my brain ceases stubbornly extrapolating from a few stray reflections, the entire structure seems to vanish. My skin crawls – but this time I manage to keep myself from panicking and turning away. I float “on my back,” “above” the middle of the “floor,” feet pointing east, and try to accept the visible proof that I am outside everything that once enclosed me.

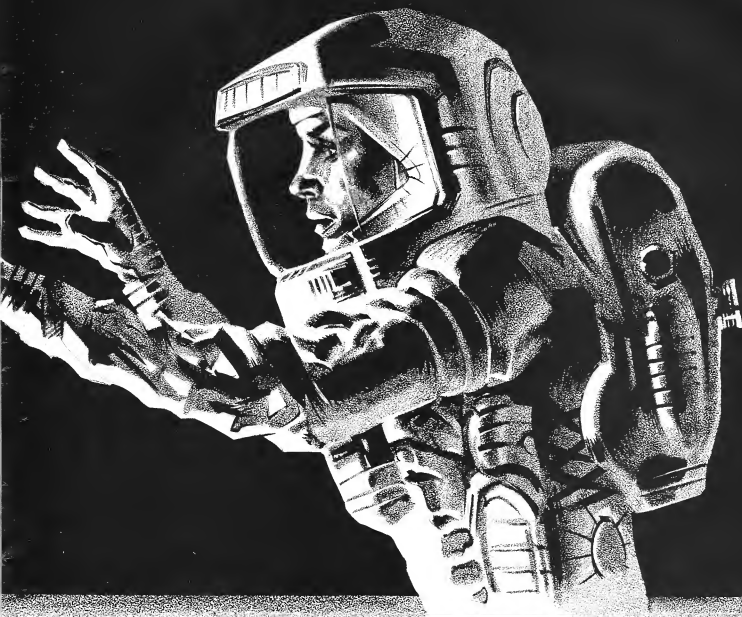
Clouds swirl over the early morning sky of the Philippines, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, northern Australia. Left to right, sunrise sweeps down across the southern Indian Ocean, exposes the tip of Sumatra, misses Vietnam, brushes the Chinese coast. The line of dawn is skewed against the unavoidable imaginary lines of longitude: advanced in the south, lagging in the north; the idea of the seasons laid out before my eyes as clearly as the notion of day and night.

The entire view stretches almost precisely from forty-five degrees south to forty-five north – albeit foreshortened and hazy at the edges – and the geometry dictates that these ninety degrees of latitude also fill ninety degrees of the Tereshkova’s sky. Madame Mityashin swears that the hotel’s orbit, twenty-seven hundred kilometres high, was chosen solely as a compromise between economic factors and the need to avoid the peak concentration of twentieth-century space junk. I believe her – but if anything, the curious symmetry is more delightful if it’s coincidental.

Sunrise touches the Malaysian peninsula, directly beneath me; I reach for my binoculars, and catch the shadows of Singapore’s towers as they come rushing in. I’d happily follow the steady progress of daylight for hours, but we glide away impatiently towards the sunlit Pacific. The pace of our motion – ten orbits a day – is the only thing I’d change about this view; I wish we could magically hover above the terminator, watching the planet below turn in its own good time.

My phone chimes. I tilt it up so I can see the screen,





without unclipping it from my belt. Zoe.

"Martin —"

"I was just thinking about you. I was hoping you'd call."

"Liar. Shut up for ten seconds; this isn't social. I'm leaving in eight minutes for OMAF; they've had some kind of accident there. If you want to come along, I can swing it, but you have to be at airlock three in five minutes, with your suit."

"What kind of accident?"

"We won't know until we get there. Yes or no?"

"Yes, but —"

Her image vanishes. I reach behind my back and take hold of the lattice that covers the "floor," pull myself around to face it, and start hauling myself unsteadily towards the exit.

Accident. Suit. Airlock.

The free-fall nausea I thought I'd banished days ago starts to make a rapid come-back. What did I tell Zoe? Here to cover the Microgravity Industries Conference for SciNet; junket of a lifetime, but to be honest boring me shitless. You're a standby medic with OES?

Fantastic! I'm only here for three more days, but if you happen to get called out —

I might even have meant it at the time. Postcoital bravado syndrome. If I don't turn up... what? They won't hang around waiting for me, not for a second. Nobody will be so much as inconvenienced. I can invent an excuse: ordered by my editor to attend the session on New Horizons in Asteroid Metallurgy, at all costs. No tacky orbital life-and-death drama scoops for SciNet.

I swing through ninety degrees into a cylindrical corridor/shaft, thinking of myself as climbing now, rather than crawling across a horizontal surface. "Climbing down" for the sake of consistency soon gives way to "climbing up" for the sake of sanity. My brain seizes on any local axis of symmetry and declares it to be "vertical" — a pragmatic choice: losing your bearings horizontally is no great trauma, but it's nice to pretend to know which way is up. Even if it can't last long: I turn again, and my reference frame turns with me.

My room is cubic, but the bed defines a floor. I stow

Illustrations by Kevin Callan



my binoculars, pull my packed suit from its locker, check the time, propel myself out of the room. I realize now that I've made up my mind to go, although I'm not sure why. I'm a science journalist, not an ambulance-chasing halfwit – and if I wanted a tour of the Orbital Monopole Accelerator Facility, turning up in the aftermath of an accident is hardly the way to go about it. Why, then? Am I hoping for one more lesson in weightless sex with Zoe? The truth is, it's better on the ground. Much better. Standing, lying, sitting; at least you know what position you're in.

**T**he Hotel Tereshkova is a disc, one hundred and fifty metres across, nonspinning. The staff commute from a nearby pair of tethered habitats, while the guests experience the novelty of freefall for a week or two, with no lasting ill effects.

I hurry towards the rim. My arms tire quickly, because I'm moving inefficiently; never letting go of the lattice completely, maintaining the illusion of "climbing." People drift past me on expertly judged ballistic trajectories, zig-zagging from wall to wall – and not just hotel staff; many of the conference participants must spend a month or two a year in orbit.

I turn a corner, and the airlock's ahead of me. Zoe is there, with a man and a woman I haven't met. All three are suited. Zoe says, "You're just in time. Our window's in three minutes. Suit up."

This, at least, I've practised. I move away from the packed suit, and manage to hook my feet into the two anchoring cavities on the first attempt. The suit asks nonchalantly, "You want to wear me?" I say, "Yes." It unfolds itself around me rapidly; there's a brief but compelling illusion of falling into a body-shaped cavity that's opened up in another dimension. When the helmet panels snap together, the whole thing inflates slightly with gas released from the polymer enzyme electrodes which will turn my exhaled carbon dioxide into oxygen and soot. The suit says cautiously, "Measurements suggest that I'm vacuum tight. So far, all systems seem to be okay."

We pass through the hotel airlock's two chambers, and then the single airlock of the bus – all without a glimpse of the outside of the vehicle, but I've seen that on video. The Orbital Transfer Bus is cylindrical, some fifteen metres long and five wide; one third of its length is fuel cells and ion drive.

There are two rows of seats running along the length of the bus, and I take my bearings from them, rather than treating the axis as vertical. As we strap in, Zoe says, "Martin Chen, Lena Rykov, Franz Abbas." My suit whispers, "I've just been allocated a radio channel to communicate with these people, if we end up in vacuum."

Abbas turns to me and says, "You don't have a camera?"

I point a thumb to my eye. "Visual and auditory cortex taps."

"Yeah? Where's the storage?"

"Abdominal cavity. Four hundred terabytes – too large to fit in the skull."

The autopilot says, "Sixty seconds to launch. Do I have your final approval?"

Zoe says, "Yes."

The bus is undocked and lowered into the launch tube; the motion is barely detectable. Rykov, across

the aisle from me, points out a display showing the orbits of the hotel and OMAF, and the path we'll follow between them. "It's just a twenty-minute flight," she says, reassuringly.

I didn't realize I looked so worried. I say, "What's going on up there, anyway? Has someone been injured?"

"We don't know. OMAF had some major equipment failure after their last experiment. A repair crew went in about four hours ago; they've been silent for the last hour."

"How many people?"

"Three. Engineers from Sakharov; they have a contract with OMAF – and half a dozen other uncrewed facilities that need occasional repairs. Sakharov would have sent a rescue team themselves, but we had an earlier window."

"So... what do you think's happened?"

She shrugs. "We'll find out soon enough."

"Back" turns to "down" – barely more than one gee, but it's a shock after six days of weightlessness. The hotel is ejecting us electromagnetically, to save ship-board energy and propellant. A few seconds later, we're out of the launch tube, and the milder thrust of the ion drive takes over.

Zoe says, "I still think there's something perverse about sweeping the asteroid belt with magnetic scoops for a decade, finding a few thousand precious monopoles... and then destroying half of them by smashing them together."

I laugh. "Sure – but if I were a particle physicist, and I got my hands on something ten-to-the-sixteenth times as massive as a proton, something that would let me pack so much energy into so little volume –"

Abbas says, "I must admit I've lost track of what they're up to. I know they reached supersymmetric energies a while ago; last I heard they were still hoping to detect the Higgsino –"

"They found it six months ago."

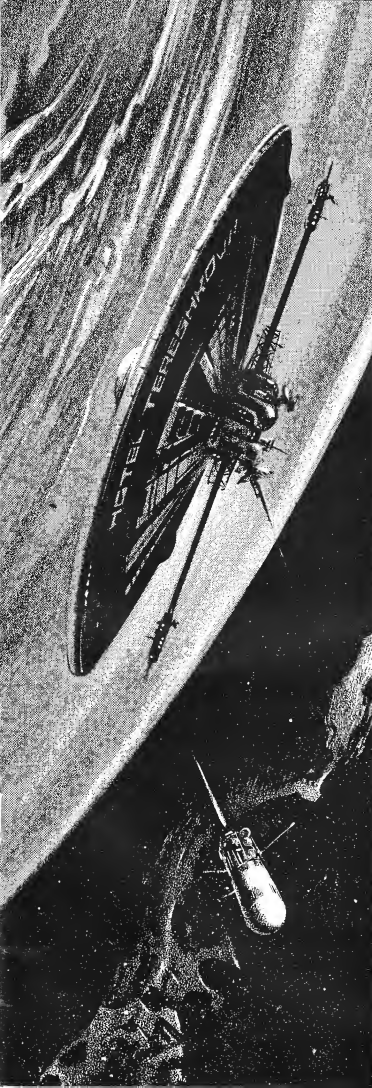
"Yeah? They'll be putting themselves out of work soon. They've found every particle in the New Standard Model. They've made femtoplasmas as hot as the Big Bang. They've unified all four forces. Where do you go from there?"

"Onwards and upwards. Or backwards and upwards. At Big Bang temperatures, the symmetry between the forces is restored... but there's one more step to take. At higher temperatures, space-time itself can absorb enough energy for all four dimensions to become equivalent. Or so the theory goes."

Rykov nods enthusiastically. "I read a paper by one of the OMAF theoreticians, not long ago: 'Phase transitions between Lorentzian and Positive Definite Metrics.' Space-time happened to 'freeze' in such a way that one of the dimensions is different from the rest... but at high enough energies, the distinction between time and the spatial dimensions should 'melt,' making the structure totally symmetric. That's what they're aiming for at OMAF, now: a hint of this state from before the Big Bang."

Zoe frowns sceptically. "'Before' the Big Bang?"

I say, "It's a matter of semantics. This four-space may have been, in a sense, joined to the 'past side' of the Big Bang singularity. It can't be given time coordinates, so it can't belong to the 'history' of the universe. But following the trend to greater symmetry back in



time, this is what you end up with...even if you've lost the whole idea of 'time' once you get there. So 'before the Big Bang' is as good a way to describe it as any."

Zoe says, "OK, that's all very well, looking back on it now...but if there was no time, how could this 'four-space' ever change into anything, let alone the universe we inhabit?"

I shrug. "Depends what you mean by 'how,' and by 'change.' If this space really was joined to our universe, it didn't so much 'change into it' as...provide the initial conditions for it. As for how or why it was connected, we can only answer that from our side of the boundary: it's what our laws of physics point to, with increasing temperature. How you 'explain' the join from the other side, I wouldn't have a clue. All our physics is based on the fact that you can always distinguish a time coordinate – even if relativity means that different observers allocate it differently. That asymmetry underlies the whole idea of cause and effect. So I don't know what 'physics' would apply to a timeless four-space...if any. Maybe there are no laws. No regularities. No explanations. Maybe it contains what it contains, and there's nothing else to say."

There's a long pause in the conversation, then Abbas proclaims solemnly, "Well, as Wittgenstein said: 'About that of which we cannot speak, we must remain silent.'"

Rykov's having none of that. "Yeah – and as Laurie Anderson replied: 'If you can't talk about it, point to it.'"

**T**he bus is windowless, but as we approach OMAF, Zoe puts an image of our destination onto one of the display screens. The accelerator itself is a wire-thin cylinder, fifty kilometres long but only twenty metres wide. Arrays of solar panels distributed along the length feed power into the giant superconducting solenoids. The north and south monopoles travel straight line paths – a linear accelerator is the only option, since the particles pack far too much momentum to be forced into a circle of manageable dimensions – and collide head-on inside the central cluster of detectors, which is housed in a sphere about two hundred metres wide. A single pair of monopoles collide at a time; the rest mass of each is a hundredth of a microgramme, but travelling close to lightspeed, kinetic energy raises that to almost a gramme. For a particle twenty orders of magnitude smaller than a hydrogen atom, that's heavy; the result is effectively a microscopic hot black hole – which instantly decays, by Hawking radiation, into a shower of fundamental particles.

Nobody lives on, or even near, OMAF; there's no need. The experiments are scheduled from Earth, and although elaborate on-site computers handle the real-time logistics of each collision, and perform the initial high-speed data acquisition, all the detailed analysis that follows is carried out on the ground. Humans are only present when something needs fixing, beyond the limited capacity of the maintenance robots.

The closer we get to OMAF, the sadder I feel at the prospect of what we're likely to find: three corpses. An accident that leaves your suit unable to radio for help is unlikely to have spared the contents. In the

shadow of these presumed deaths, my nervousness about merely coming along for the ride seems shameful, trivial – and at the same time, more reasonable than ever. An OES emergency mission is utterly routine – but no doubt the repair mission was “utterly routine” too.

The autopilot brings us down to orbital velocity, then nudges us towards the detector sphere's second dock. The repair crew's bus is still in place, and looks perfectly intact; its computers report that it's fully functional, but unoccupied.

The docking takes place with a barely perceptible tap of metal on metal, then the slightly louder thud of locking pins sliding into place. Zoe and Rykov have studied the repair crew's last report – with annotations by colleagues from Sakharov, and OMAF control in Geneva – and agreed on the best route to take through the access tunnels to the point where the engineers were probably headed next. It's Abbas's turn to stay behind in the bus, which he seems to accept with good humour.

The detector sphere is unpressurized; as the bus's airlock empties in a frosty gust, my suit whispers direly, “We're in vacuum.” I resist the temptation to mutter, “No shit?” Talking back only encourages them. I still don't believe the cognitive scientists who claim that “common sense” knowledge of the world is impossible without at least a primitive kind of sentience. What they really meant was, they found it too hard to create it from scratch – and the systems they've copied from human brains can't be disentangled from all kinds of other anthropomorphic paraphernalia.

The tunnel is unlit, but the side beams from our suits scatter off the matte white surface, so there's no trouble making out our immediate surroundings. Handholds are few and far between compared to the Tereshkova, so I watch the way Zoe and Rykov move, and try to mimic them. I'm surprised at how well I do – and the worst that can happen, after all, is a premature collision with the tunnel wall. I always have the option of using my suit's trimming jets, but the supply of propellant is meant to be kept in reserve for emergencies.

Several minutes pass before I realize that I've lost any notion of vertical. I wait for panic and vertigo to set in – or the sudden reassertion of my usual comforting illusions – but neither eventuates. The tunnel is just... the tunnel. I haven't lost my bearings at all; I've simply lost the need to pretend that one direction – my imaginary “up” – is special.

Zoe scans the walls ahead with an infrared viewer, but – unlike me – the members of the repair crew aren't likely to have left many handprints, and in any case, the warmth of the electronics behind the panels probably would have drowned out the evidence by now. I gather that most of the equipment here is left powered on constantly, rather than shut down between collisions; start-up surges cause more damage to most components than continuous use, and switching some detectors on and off can mean waiting days or weeks for them to regain thermal stability.

I catch up with Zoe – unnecessarily, but I hate talking without eye contact – and say, “What do you think happened? They can't all have holed their suits, simultaneously: There's nothing here to oxidize a fire.”

“My guess is electrocution.”

“But...” I raise a gloved hand.

She shakes her head. “Suits are only moderate insulators. A few hundred kilovolts per metre would go right through them.”

“Well, that's nice to know. Now tell me how to move without touching the walls.”

“I'm carrying a field meter. We're not going to be surprised.”

“They were.”

“They were probably elbow deep in cables. Or one or two of them were – and the third couldn't fight the instinctive reaction to try to drag them free.”

“I can't believe that. Surely they would have shut off power to whatever they were working on.”

She laughs drily. “Well, yes. And in a perfect world full of perfect people and perfect equipment, nobody – on Earth or in orbit – would ever die that way. But if the equipment was infallible, they wouldn't even have been here, would they? We'll have the stupid details soon enough: an isolation switch failed, or someone screwed up, ignored procedure. Whatever –”

Rykov breaks in. “What's that?” She shines a hand beam straight ahead. In the distance, there's a smudge of dark colour, deep blues and reds, spread across the entire width of the tunnel.

Zoe says, “It looks like some kind of... liquid?”

I don't know what, if anything, stays liquid in a vacuum, but it certainly appears that way. The colours are in motion, mixing and swirling – a bit like a fast-motion view of a gas giant's atmosphere – but are clearly confined to a flat surface. The heaviest gas, the most sluggish mist, would have diffused forward raggedly as we watched.

Zoe says, “I've never seen anything like it. Some of these detectors are full of chemicals; something must have been spilt. I think we'll have to backtrack and go around it, but it's worth a closer look, first. Take it slowly.”

**T**he nearer we get, the stranger the spectacle becomes. Not only is the tunnel blocked by a boundary as sharply defined as the surface of the water in a well, but parts of the “liquid” are transparent, and when we peer into the depths, the convoluted, ever-changing surface patterns can be seen extending back into the distance, like bizarre extruded forms. Every motion, however rapid, however subtle – down to every tiny wisp of colour that drifts across the surface – is mimicked immediately at every depth.

Rykov says, without much conviction, “I think there's some kind of liquid crystal in one of the detectors. A highly directional polymer.”

Zoe says, “Corrosive?”

“I wouldn't think so.”

“Well, this is something else, then.” She shines a beam into a clear patch of “liquid” where it meets the tunnel wall. The wall comes to an end precisely at the surface; the “liquid” continues off to the side, with no sign of even the slightest vestige of what should have been there.

Rykov says dully, “If they were caught in this, they're dead.”

Zoe says, “Maybe. But what the fuck is it?” She reaches into a suit flap and takes out a black marker

pen. I say, "Are you sure you —"

She touches the tip of the pen to the surface. There's a whipcrack of static on the radio, and a brilliant flash of green light — a line of green light, instantly stretching from the point of contact, far into the depths.

She jerks the pen back, and the light vanishes.

I blink at the afterimage, dazed. Rykov swears. Zoe says softly, "No give at all. It felt solid."

This is no "chemical," spilt from one of the detectors; the idea is preposterous. What, then? I hear my own words tumbling out, as if listening from a distance, eavesdropping-on myself in a dream.

"Something must have happened here, last collision. They created an exotic vacuum state in the accelerator... but it didn't just vanish in a matter of femtoseconds. And it didn't stay confined to the collision point. Maybe they reached the totally symmetric four-space, and it decayed — but not back into normal space-time."

And why should it have? In the particle physicist's multidimensional landscape of vacuum states, where altitude equals energy, and the map coordinates are all the various properties of the vacuum, the topological and physical "constants" we're used to are represented by one point in a valley in a far corner of the map — the valley into which the observable universe happened to fall as it cooled, a fraction of a second after the Big Bang. Push a boulder from this valley all the way up to the ultimate peak of the central energy mountain, and then let it go; why should it fall back to the very same point again?

Rykov says, "Two spatial and two time-like dimensions? One of the times is aligned with our own; the other, we're seeing as depth?"

I make a choking sound that's almost a laugh. "Maybe. Maybe the matter in there has cooled down enough to condense into 'atoms,' and what we're looking at is some kind of chemical reaction in a two-dimensional gas. And if there's no apparent change with depth — with the second time-like dimension — that might just be a question of scale. If lightspeed comes into it, a microsecond could stretch for hundreds of metres."

I stare at the prismatic swirls, and suddenly recall why we're here. The matter in there might include the distant remnants of three people.

Zoe says, "If this was formed straight after the collision, how could the crew end up trapped in there?"

Rykov says, "Maybe it wasn't. Maybe it formed after they arrived. Or started off in a smaller region, and suddenly expanded."

"Then it might expand again, mightn't it?" She hesitates, then says, "We're evacuating, immediately. There's nobody alive here."

Zoe and Rykov turn, but I can't take my eyes off this awful miracle. Two-dimensional chemistry. Two orthogonal times. I sweep my hand beam across the boiling surface one last time, amazed that our kind of light can cross the boundary and return with information; perhaps at the surface it excites emission of the local form, and vice versa —

"Wait!"

"Martin —"

"Look. At the edge." Where, just minutes ago, the tunnel wall touched the boundary of the two-space, a gap has opened up. I play the beam around the edge;



the width of the gap varies smoothly, from a millimetre or less on one side, to several centimetres at the point diametrically opposite.

I say, "It must be shrinking."

Rykov says, "Or we're rotating away from it."

"What?"

"OMAF has a slight spin. A three-hour period. If the region didn't form symmetrically around the collision point, or if it's drifted off-centre since it formed..."

"You mean, we're turning away from the place where it's furthest from the centre?"

"I think so. Like...the tide going out, when the Earth's rotation carries you away from the tidal bulge. Although whether this thing has a bulge, or whether it's a sphere that's drifted off-centre..." She gestures helplessly. "Who knows what shape it is?"

"Three hours. So when the repair crew were here, this might have been on the other side? They might have seen nothing but empty space?"

Zoe says, "And then what? They found a fucking great hole in the middle of OMAF, and they just wandered in to take a look? Without telling anyone?"

"Sakharov might have been over the horizon."

"You ever heard of relay satellites? And even if they couldn't get a channel, there are plenty of other people they could have informed."

"Yeah – and in a perfect world, no doubt they would have. But maybe they thought they'd leave it until their regular call-in...after they'd found out a few more details. You haven't reported anything back to Abbas yet, have you?"

She glares at me, then proceeds to do so.

I turn to Rykov. "I still don't understand. There are access tunnels leading in from all directions. If they went in with a decent amount of propellant, they should have been able to make it out...even if the two-space blocked the way, so they couldn't return by the same route."

"Unless there's something else in there. Another phase besides the two-space."

I stare at the widening gap. "Something else? You think so?"

"I don't know what the energy density of the two-space is, but it's hard to believe that it's precisely the same as our space-time. So creating it must have either used up, or liberated, a great deal of energy – much more than that of the original monopole collision. If it used up energy, what supplied it? If it liberated energy, where did it go? A different phase, with the opposite energy relationship."

I shake my head to clear it. "So the collision just seeded the process, and these two phases grew together out of our vacuum...one with higher energy, one with lower energy...like a see-saw tipping. But then, why'd they stop at this size? Why not keep on growing?"

She shrugs. "Or – equally – why not cancel each other out, and vanish? I don't know. There could be surface effects from the interactions at the boundaries, complicating the energy function, favouring a certain size."

"So what is the other phase?" The gap is a metre wide now, at its largest. Wide enough to slip through. For the first time in days, my weightlessness is beginning to feel like falling again.

Rykov says, "If it has a different metric, there's only one remaining possibility."

"You mean an extra spatial dimension – to balance the two-space, with one less? A large, stable region of totally symmetric four-space?"

Zoe says, "Shit. I've lost Franz."

Rykov says, "Let me try. Channel one." I watch her lips move; she repeats his name with increasing frustration.

Zoe signals to her to stop. "It doesn't matter. We're heading straight back. If Martin can drag himself away."

It's clear, now, that the two-space is a sphere, much smaller than the cavity that it's gouged from the centre of OMAF: I can see it curving away from us, across the width of the tunnel. I shine my hand beam into the void, as if half expecting to see the glint of a suited figure in the distance, but there's nothing visible at all.

I say, "Gladly."

As we launch ourselves along the tunnel, Rykov says, "I don't understand why we've lost contact with Franz."

Zoe says, impatiently, "It doesn't matter."

I say, "I take back what I said before. I don't think they would have gone in there. Not all three of them, without a word."

Nobody replies. We travel in a white halo, back towards the safety of the bus. Well, no Mercy Dash trash for SciNet's viewers, after all; just the first glimpse of a different kind of universe. I can almost feel the stored vision inside me, heavy in my gut like an undigested meal.

Rykov mutters, "Unless there's something in the way. Blocking the signal."

Zoe says, "What are you on about?"

My blood freezes – but I can't believe what Rykov's suggesting. There was no sign of damage between the airlock and the two-space; if the hypothetical bubble of four-space had drifted further from OMAF's centre, surely it would have carved out its own void?

What happened to the repair crew, though, if they didn't go into the central cavity? Did it start with the loss of radio contact with the retransmitters in their bus?

Rykov starts to fill Zoe in on the argument for a second phase. As we drift up to the tunnel wall, the two of them grab hand holds and bring themselves to a halt. I hit the wall ahead of them with outstretched hands, and bounce awkwardly; the wall is designed to gently absorb the energy of the impact, but my instincts go awry and I end up pushing myself away.

In an instant, everything vanishes. Darkness, silence, numbness swallow me. I try to cry out, to wave my arms – but I hear and feel nothing, and have no way of judging if I've succeeded in moving a limb or making a sound.

My panic is so ineffectual that it's difficult to sustain. After a second or two, I find myself observing, almost calmly: I've blundered straight into Rykov's other phase, whatever it is – and one part of the mystery has just been clarified; it gouged no cavity along its path, because ordinary matter can, evidently, drift right through the boundary. Like me. Like the repair crew.

Well, the walls of the access tunnels seemed to have

survived the experience, intact. A good sign. And the repair crew? Not so good. I wait for something to happen – some further dysfunction – and then wonder if I'd actually notice if I was lapsing into imbecility, en route to brain death.

If this is symmetric four-space, why am I still alive – let alone perceiving the passage of time? In a universe without cause and effect, why haven't I simply disintegrated into a gas of randomly scattered particles? This part of OMAF clearly didn't, either – but why not? Have I dragged some trace of the physics of space-time with me? Are the atoms of my body running on sheer "memory," maintaining a kind of causal momentum? I can't believe that.

Unless...I haven't passed through the boundary, but merely deformed it. Maybe it's as flexible as the two-space border was rigid. Maybe there's a bubble of ordinary space-time clinging to me, surrounding me; I'm not in the four-space – I'm merely surrounded by it, like a scuba diver in water.

In which case, when will I surface? It could be an hour or more before OMAF's rotation reunites me with my native universe. Can I last that long? I don't even know if I'm breathing or not.

And...an hour or more of whose time? Adrift, disconnected, am I still in synch with the outside world? Is my time running at the same rate? Or even in the same direction?

Fear returns – and then, in glorious symmetry, an explosion of sensation. I sob, gasping for air, flailing for a handhold – but I'm still in the middle of the tunnel.

I close my eyes and say, "Suit: take me to the wall behind me."

It replies enthusiastically, "Yes!" The trimming jets start up – inaudibly, but I swear I can feel the milligees of thrust. I don't open my eyes until I hear Zoe's voice.

"Martin? Are you okay?"

"I think so." I'm shaking badly, but I don't seem to be injured. I look around; I'm almost touching the tunnel wall.

"Listen to me: keep moving. Don't try to come back this way. It must be protruding into the tunnel – you seem to have grazed the edge of the bulge. We're going to back off and wait for it to move out of the way – but you have to go on to the bus."

I'm about to reply, but then I look back down the tunnel.

Just past the point where I left the far wall, there's a long, glistening object, stretched out towards me. The sides are a silvery white, exactly like the surface of my suit. The object is ten or twelve metres long, but in cross-section, it's precisely the size and shape of a human body. The end that faces me drives this home, unambiguously: from the walls of the skull, to the two rows of white spots that must be the ribs, to the startling pink fibres of muscle, to the transected coils of the intestines, nestled around an obliquely cut cubic package: an array of high density memory chips...

I look away. I say, "I'm okay. I'm fine. I understand. I'll meet you back at the bus."

Zoe says, "We'll –"

The radio cuts out.

I glance back one more time. The cross-section is growing smaller – moving closer to the surface of the

body. I keep half expecting blood to spurt from the open arteries, but it doesn't, of course. *It didn't.* Nothing has been cut open; this is just an unusual point of view.

Part of me badly wants to see the end of this – to stay until the slice shrinks to a point and vanishes – but the four-space must be encroaching further into the tunnel, and I doubt that I'm clear of its path.

I move on.

**W**hen Zoe calls in on the radio, I almost cry out with relief. Abbas grins unsteadily; I'm not sure if he can yet quite bring himself to believe a word of what we've told him. Minutes later, they're in the airlock; seconds later, safe on board.

Rykov says, frowning, "Visible light and matter could get through – but not radio. I wonder if it's a question of energy density, or length scale."

I shake my head dumbly. "I wouldn't know."

On the trip back, an awkward silence descends. No one wants to speak of the fate of the repair crew – but I think I know what must have happened.

Like me, they must have stumbled into the four-space. The space-time they dragged with them would have kept them alive, for a while – but where I did little more than graze the surface, they must have plunged right into the depths.

They might even have survived – if all they'd had to do was stay alive as they drifted down the tunnel, waiting for their forward motion to carry them out of danger. But they lost...direction. Cut off from the rest of the universe, immersed in a space where all dimensions were the same, their local time coordinates swung out of alignment with the outside world. Like divers whose buoyancy carried them, not up, but sideways. In ordinary space-time, a straight line is the longest path between two points; travel to a distant star and back, and you age less than if you'd "travelled" the straight world-line of staying at home. In four-space, though, as in three-space, any detour can only add to the "distance." Wandering back and forth at random, on their way between entering and emerging from the region – two events, externally, maybe thirty or forty seconds apart – their path might have added up to anything.

Minutes. Hours. Days.

I catch Zoe watching me, uneasily; she manages a thin smile, then looks away.

I close my eyes – and see again my own bundle of "world-lines," the trail of my brief ordeal stretched out behind me. And I wonder...

Where was I, at that moment? Outside the four-space, looking back – or in there, still blind, still disoriented, still waiting to surface?

How can anything really be over – when "the past" is, visibly, nothing more than another place? Was that nothing but an illusion, a confusing aberration...or was it a glimpse of the deeper truth?

I open my eyes, and tap Rykov on the shoulder. She turns.

"This may sound like a stupid question – but I'd really like to know which way is down."

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**Greg Egan** (see his bibliography, *IZ* 55 page 14) has recently sold a new story to Paul McAuley and Kim Newman for their forthcoming original anthology, *In Dreams* (Gollancz).

# Blossoms That Coil and Decay

## David Langford

**A**fter the usual kind of cloudy transition, Walter Ledgett found himself standing in what could only be the Café Royal.

Tobacco smoke rose everywhere like incense towards the high ceiling of the domino room. There were gilded pillars, cliffs of crimson velvet, tall mirrored panels that threw the light a little wearily back and forth through the fumes. Ledgett peered with suspicion into the nearest mirror, feeling there was something lacking: himself. An unreflective man. No, there he was after all, but there had surely been a delay. And the shadows that brooded in the corners or huddled under the tables where dominoes clicked against marble... were they not a trifle too black and absolute? He made a mental note. He was, after all, a critic.

The low buzz of conversation, though not as yet intelligible, was punctuated by bright, sharp points of what must be epigrams. Green carnations adorned a hundred lapels. This was precisely as it should be. Somewhere, somewhere far off, She would be waiting. "This," Ledgett told himself, "is life!" His gold pocket-watch reported a trifle less than an hour to midnight. It was time to join in and ●

● around the table. "The art of true sincerity," said Wilde, gesturing with a fat and curiously crab-like hand, "is to be at all times perfectly insincere."

The usual little ripple of delighted appreciation spread out. Only the wasted, coughing Beardsley seemed not to notice, absorbed as he was in sketching a head-and-shoulders of Ledgett upon the flyleaf of the second number of *The Yellow Book*. From what he could see of its stylized lines Ledgett did not consider the picture much of a likeness, but it was undeniably in character. A perfect specimen of the Beardsley era. Here he was among them all, burning with a hard, gem-like flame.

"Never look askance at Aubrey's drawings," put in another member of the charmed circle. "It's well known that he employs black arts and infallibly captures one's very soul."

"Bien entendu!" cried Whistler merrily. "Which is why you are so careful to keep his precious portrait of yourself in a locked upper room!"

Dorian Gray flushed slightly. There was a pause, in which through some alchemy of small gatherings it became evident that Ledgett himself was now expected to scintillate. He drew on the available resources and was interested to hear himself say, "Why, we are all art critics now. I'm told the secretary of a certain London club has presented a late-paying member with a

subscription reminder which runs, 'Dear Mr Whistler, It is not a Nocturne in Purple or a Symphony in Blue and Grey we are after, but an Arrangement in Gold and Silver!'"

The merriment was almost universal. "Ha, ha, I wish I'd said that," gasped Wilde.

"You will, Oscar, you will," retorted Ledgett at once, and sealed his triumph. I'm doing well, he thought, but... Dorian Gray? Reposing on the laurels of success, he listened as Wilde favoured the company with an interminable work in progress, full of strange rhymes: hippogriff and hieroglyph, catafalque and Amenalk (allegedly a god of Heliopolis). When it came to corridors and Mandragores, he expected everyone to groan; but they didn't.

And now the lord of language was persuaded into a further reading, from the richly poisoned *Salomé*. "I will bite it with my teeth as one bites a ripe fruit." This was more like ●

● liquor had sunk low in the glasses and a different poet was now declaiming in a high, ecstatic voice; a tiny man with a wild mop of auburn hair, head thrown so far back that his fluting words seemed meant for the remote ceiling.

Ah, delights of the time of my teething,  
Felise, Fragoletta, Yolande!  
Foam-yeast of a youth in its seething  
On blasted and blithering sand!  
Snake-crowned on your tresses and belted  
With blossoms that coil and decay,  
Ye are gone, ye are lost, ye are melted  
Like ices in May.

Ledgett had done a sufficiency of homework, had read the instruction manual and could tap the system's knowledge bank. By the 1890s Algernon Charles Swinburne could surely not be here, would instead be wearing out his thirty years' genteel house arrest in Putney under the stifling care of whatsisname, Watts-Dunton, strictly rationed to one half-bottle of Bass's pale ale each day. And weren't those particular words by someone else, some parodist?

It was a cold shock to realize that he was arguing with this as though it were reality, rather than smiling to find the designer had a sense of humour. The illusion was insidious. The fat gold watch had ticked off half an hour.

Someone, a dim man called Soames whose attempted epigrams had invariably fallen flat, was enquiring about poetic delights to come. "I have added yet four more jets of boiling and gushing infamy to the peren-



nial and poisonous fountain of Dolores," said this Swinburne with a certain pride.

Another scrap of knowledge floated to the surface of his mind and Ledgett found himself possessed by an imp of perverse mischief. "And have you added any further delightful rhymes to your splendid unpublished epic of flogging and birching, *The Whipingham Papers*?"

There was a jarring sensation; the high, smoky mirrors seemed to ripple for an instant. That had not been an expected play. The tiny poet screamed and flung himself across the table at his mocker. It was all very embarrassing. Only Frank Harris the indiscreet (not yet famous for his lying autobiography *My Life and Loves*, not for decades) laughed aloud. Ledgett found himself struggling against a ridiculously puny attack. The ravenous teeth that have smitten through the bruises that blossom and bud, the lips of the foam and the fangs, and so on and so forth. Somewhere he heard a woman's voice say, or quote (and he knew she was talking to Rossetti): "I can't make him understand that biting's no use!"

What a quintessentially *fin de siècle* situation, he thought. At the next table, Max Beerbohm's pencil was already outlining a wild caricature of the wriggling little tableau. Ledgett decided he should move on; he'd become carried away; he must have drunk ●

● had touched only the outer circle of the game, scratched with a fingernail at the whitening of the sepulchre. Beyond the mirrors lay confusion and darkness, a drowsy perfumed maelstrom that spiralled down to the promise (ever denied) of dark love and easeful death. Where was she?

Like the slow stroke of doom an official hand fell on Wilde's shoulder in the Cadogan Hotel, while the ninth Marquess of Queensbury hefted a sinister boxing-glove and Lord Alfred Douglas whined disapproval of the unfair and beastly rhetoric in *De Profundis*. Clovis Sangrail made well-turned but merciless jokes about Bunburying in earnest. Science announced nonentity and Art admired decay, while Ledgett noted down each shade, echo and quotation with due critical attention. Sneeringly the white-locked artist flung a pot of paint in the public's face, as out in the garden of torments Octave Mirbeau screamed on one long, high and delicious note, the shuddering harmonics sending a last fatal vibration thrilling through the long-riven façade of Usher. "MADMAN! I TELL YOU THAT SHE NOW STANDS WITHOUT THE DOOR!" The huge antique panels threw slowly back their ponderous and ebony jaws, and standing there with courtly politeness a looming figure took off his face to reveal his mask.

Ledgett moved cautiously among the shifting images, trying to play along, score what points he might, and generally do his bit to "paint the mortal soul of Nature with the living hues of Art." Time snapped at his heels. At length, by a route obscure and lonely, splashed with scarlet moments and lasciviously purple patches, he penetrated ●

● thick drapes and hangings whose dark colours were yet so rich that they cloyed his eyes as honey cloy the tongue. Great white flowers drooped in the urns, issuing a sickly-sweet perfume, the petals still broad

and firm but enclosing a brown centre of corruption that glistened with deliquescence in the dying candlelight. Flowers of evil. He knew that he had come to the heart of things.

She had no particular name, of course, this unattainable Faustine or Dolores. Folds of thin silk ran like water over her heavy white limbs as she plied the liqueur organ that filled one whole wall of this chamber, playing exquisite trills and cadences, now tempting him with a thimble of green Chartreuse, now tormenting with the breathless knife-edge of creme de menthe. Always her eyes remained in shadow.

"No, let it be absinthe," Ledgett declared, feeling fairly sure of his ground. One should always cry for madder music and for stronger wine. "Her deceitful, cloudy green, her forbidden tang of wormwood... Let us revel with the green sorceress!" That last bit should have been in French, but the exact phrase had escaped him. The hands of the watch hovered close to midnight.

She brought it to him in a crystal goblet. Light points glinted in the opalescent sea-green. He lifted the vessel, drank, and with his free hand reached out to her, the secret, the unattainable. Excitement pulsed within. In his heart was a blind desire, in his eyes foreknowledge of death. She played a teasing game with him, always elusive yet always backing a little toward the velvet of the waiting couch. Now...

The symptoms were already well advanced before he recognized their coming. The hot skin, the violent heartbeat, the dry mouth, these might be mere arousal; but the faint candle-flames smote on him with thunderous brightness, and the outlines of things had begun to blur.

"In...the...drink?" The words came out indistinctly (even swallowing had become a mighty effort), but she understood and answered with the small calm smile of a woman who had trafficked for strange webs and been dead many times: "Belladonna."

A beautiful word, a perfect word. Not bright lights, then, but widely dilated eyes. It was too late to ponder on such further effects of atropine poisoning as hilarity and delirium. Ledgett was too exuberantly excited. Ha ha, what a predicament! He lurched forward into a chaos of wavering double images. The woman deftly drew aside the widest of the wall-hangings to reveal what lay behind.

"Behold your resting-place, my lover, my lover who must die."

He threshed about wildly but was already weakening, could not resist as gently she stripped off his garments and eased him into the gleaming, silk-lined coffin. Then she bent low over him. "You will not sleep alone." Her face was very close to his. The face was now a bare skull. All the gongs of midnight were striking. On the edge of coma, Ledgett gabbed a weak entreaty which must have been a suitable cue from the knowledge base: she replied instantly and with satisfaction.

"Yes, for the love of God!"

Then her creamy arms were ●

● weighing the flat VR pack meditatively in one hand and searching for words, fluent words, any words. One needed to wrap the whole thing up neatly. Of the many anachronistic sequences, that of the Reverend

C.L. Dodgson photographing nymphets was perhaps the least relevant to the claimed central theme.

The interactive data-leotard had grown hot and sweaty and now itched abominably, especially where the thick cable from the systems unit joined it at the rough position of Ledgett's navel. An often witty romp through the long-gone fantasy world of "fin-de-siècle." Amid the new upsurge of total experiences available from virtual reality systems, "Nineties" stands out... does not stand out... is unique... fails to... Details, details. That could wait for the conclusion, and the TLS copy date was still three days distant.

So much space for scene-setting and ambience, so much more for the part to which the punters would skip, eager to know the quality of that last embrace: By way of climax this VR claims to outdo all others in offering a wide variety of terminal experiences, so that the diligent player may indeed die a thousand deaths, all tinged with voluptuous corruption and degeneration. The reviewer's own exploration certainly appeared to bear this out. And after the sweets that are sour as the sorrel's, the morbid alliance of beauty and abhorrence, the twisting of straightforward experiences into unwholesome emotional shapes ("I have been faithful to thee, Cynara, in my fashion")...after all this it's refreshing to surface again in the modern era, a century and more since the whole sickly movement passed away.

That would be the backbone of the piece. Ledgett jotted down further rapid notes, with particular attention to minute lapses in the programming. And, for refreshment, before he peeled off the tight sheath of sensory connectors and took a much needed shower, how about a robust dip into some less languorous and cloying death-experiences from his own select ROM-pack library?

The digital wall-clock pulsed a time well past midnight, but that didn't matter. "For he who lives more lives than one, more deaths than one must die." His hand reached out anew, wavering between the already well-handled VRs of *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Alien*, trembling minutely in anticipation, hungry for the lips of his desire.

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**David Langford** produces the single-sheet newsletter *Ansi-ble*, which John Clute described in our last issue as "the best fanzine now published in this country." We'd like to point out to readers who have been pestering us about how to get hold of *Ansi-ble* that it's "available at random fan gatherings, by whim or for stamped addressed envelopes – sorry, no paid subscriptions." Dave Langford lives in Reading, where he also runs the mail-order computer-software company *Ansi-ble Information*.

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## interzone

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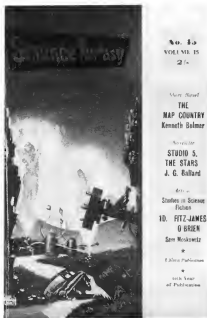
# Adolf Hitler: His Part in Our Struggle

## A Brief Economic History of British SF Magazines Brian Stableford

As *Interzone* reaches its tenth anniversary it has already become the fourth most prolific British sf magazine, having published more issues than *Nebula* (41) but not yet as many as *Authentic* (85), *Science Fantasy/Impulse* (81 + 12), or the oft-reincarnated *New Worlds* (more than 200). It is appropriate that we should celebrate its birthday by looking back at the history of its predecessors, so that its readers may better understand its position in that Great Chain of Being which is British sf.

As most of its readers will know, *Interzone* began life as a gleam in the eye of an eight-man collective, whose motives in launching it were uncommercial. They were members of a quasi-masonic inner circle of the British sf community, who shared a deep conviction that there really ought to be a British sf magazine, to celebrate the Britishness of British sf and to function as a forcing-ground for new domestic talent. In this they were carrying forward a tradition; almost all the British sf magazines which have existed were born of similar uncommercial enthusiasms. In view of this fact, it may seem eccentric to present an economic history of British sf magazines rather than a critical one, but if we are to understand the strange and rather sad history of these entities we can only do so if we see them in their true light: as starry-eyed ventures launched into a cruel and unpredictable world where the laws of supply and demand have worked in an exceptionally wayward fashion.

I have before me as I write a battered copy of the first ever issue of *New Worlds* – not the one which Ted Carnell and Frank Arnold persuaded Stephen Frances (*alias* Hank Janson) to launch under the Pendulum Publications imprint in 1946, but the March 1939 issue, the first of what turned out to be a run of four produced by means of a primitive duplicator. It contains a story by John Victor Peterson, a British author who had already made five



appearances in the American sf pulps, and a discussion of his writing methods by one "Thornton Ayre." Ayre was actually the same person as the "John Cotton" whose story in the inaugural issue of *Science Fiction* is so highly praised in the news column of the same issue: John Russell Fearn. Fearn was by far and away the most prolific of the half-dozen or so British writers who had sold material to the American sf magazines, and both Ayre and Fearn were to be listed on the contents page of the first issue of the "professional" *New Worlds*.

The swift demise of this frail and fragile version of *New Worlds* was caused by the same event that caused the demise of many other periodicals: the outbreak of the Second World War. Had it not been for Adolf Hitler, and the disruption of the economic affairs of Britain which resulted – directly and indirectly – from his activities, the history of British sf magazines might have been very different. It was Hitler's war which spoiled all the early attempts to launch British sf magazines, and it

was the artificial economic situation which existed after that war's end which determined the nature and the fortunes of the second generation of such magazines.

The story of British sf magazines might be said to have begun with an experimental weekly boys' paper called *Scoops*, published by the firm founded by C. Arthur Pearson, whose turn-of-the-century magazines had done so much to promote scientific romance by publishing important early work by George Griffith, H.G. Wells and M.P. Shiel. But *Scoops* lasted only 20 issues in the spring of 1934, and did not use the term "science fiction," which had not yet been imported from the US pulp magazines as a generic label. It serialized Professor A.M. Low's "Space" (reprinted as *Adrift in the Strotosphere*), reprinted Conan Doyle's *The Poison Belt* and – inevitably – featured some early work by John Russell Fearn, but it was not aimed at an adult audience and its brief existence is merely a curiosity to be noted.

The real history of British sf begins with the growth of a community of fans who had discovered sf in imported American sf pulps. They were moved to communicate with one another and to organize themselves by the founding of the Science Fiction League in Hugo Gernsback's *Wonder Stories* – a cunning marketing device which gave birth to the strange world of sf fandom. There were five British chapters of the SFL, and it was under the aegis of one of them – the Nuneaton branch – that Maurice Hanson began issuing in 1936 the forerunner of *New Worlds*, a fanzine called *Novoe Terroe*.

*Novoe Terroe* was soon joined – and overtaken – by a more regular and much more handsome periodical: *Scientifiction: The British Fantasy Review*. *Scientifiction* was edited by journalist Walter Gillings, whose professional contacts enabled him to have it printed in a proper manner, rather

than being run off on a duplicator. Its first issue (February 1937) included an interview with John Beynon Harris, at that time the second most successful British writer of pulp sf, and hopeful articles about the future of British sf by three of the others: Benson Herbert, Festus Pragnell and John Russell Fearn. It also carried news of the first ever "conference of British fantasy fans," which was organized in Leeds by the British chapters of the Science Fiction League – a meeting which led to the founding of the [British] Science Fiction Association.

The third issue of *Scientifiction* (June 1937) was able to announce – alongside an article by Eric Frank Russell and an interview with Olaf Stapledon – the founding of Britain's very own sf pulp magazine, *Tales of Wonder* and *Super-Science*, also to be edited by Gillings. The announcement boasted that the first issue would include stories by all the leading British contributors to the American sf pulps; the contents page featured Benson Herbert, Festus Pragnell, Eric Frank Russell, John Beynon [Harris] and (under two different names) John Russell Fearn. *Tales of Wonder*, as it became, might well have become an established magazine; but the advent of the war killed off any hope of that. After publishing 16 issues it fell victim to paper-rationing and to the slightly-belated conscription of its editor (who had initially been exempted as a conscientious objector).

By the time it died, *Tales of Wonder* was no longer Britain's only sf magazine. The popularity of the US pulp magazines which were sold cheaply under the label "Yank Mags" in Woolworth's had not gone unnoticed by British entrepreneurs. Some British publishers began reprinting American pulps – including a few sf titles – and others experimented with their own domestic products. The effect of the war was to cut abruptly short almost all of these experiments. Only one sf magazine – the reprint *Astounding*, founded in 1939 – kept going through the war years, and its size and schedule were both severely restricted by paper rationing. A second domestic sf pulp, *Fontosy*, was founded by Newnes in 1938, but it only lasted three issues before its editor was conscripted and the threat of impending paper-rationing persuaded the publisher to abort the whole venture. Its contributors included John Beynon [Harris], Eric Frank Russell and (of course) John Russell Fearn.

Had the war not strangled British pulp magazines more-or-less at birth, an interesting competition would surely have developed between the reprinted and domestic titles. As things were, various small publishers like Gerald G. Swan and Benson Her-

bert's Utopian Publications continued to issue sf in an assortment of formats – usually, by necessity, very cramped – using any odd bits of paper they could lay their hands on (most of it entirely unsuitable for the purpose).

Paper rationing continued for some time after 1945, and it played a major part in shaping the subsequent patterns of British publishing. Its slow relaxation created a temporary vacuum of demand for reading-matter. Paperback books, which had never become firmly established in pre-war Britain, enjoyed a great advantage while paper was still on ration (an advantage reflected in the generous wartime allowance which had given Penguin an all-important early boost), and dozens of paperback companies sprang up, eager to exploit the window of economic opportunity. Many of these publishers copied the strategies



of the American paperback companies, whose marketing methods were heavily influenced by those of the pulp magazines they replaced: books were sorted into distinct genre lines, and dressed with sensational and suggestive covers. The new British paperback publishers – eager to appeal to the lowbrow market disdained by the rather austere Penguins – did likewise.

The biggest profits made by the new British paperback companies came from hard-boiled stories of American gangsterism – including the Hank Janson books, which cashed in on the huge success of James Hadley Chase's *No Orchids for Miss Blondish* – and from slightly risqué romances of the kind mass-produced by "Paul Renin" (Richard Coynne). Inevitably, though, they began to publish science fiction too, helping to establish a market space into which British sf magazines might comfortably fit. Hamilton & Co launched the pulp-format *Futuristic*

*Stories and Strange Adventures* in 1946, filling the pages with juvenile fiction by the prolific hack N. Wesley Firth, but these failed to sell and were quickly aborted. The pulp-sized *Pendulum New Worlds* initially fared no better; it suffered acute distribution difficulties, and *Pendulum* went bankrupt, but Ted Carnell and other regular attenders of the first-Thursday-of-every-month meetings of the London sf community (then held at the White Horse in Fetter Lane) promptly formed a new company – Nova Publications – to take it over.

In the meantime, Walter Gillings had also taken up more-or-less exactly where he was forced to leave off by conscription. He launched a new digest-sized *Fantasy*, which featured several early stories by Arthur Clarke as well as the everpresent Fearn. It looked far more professional than either *Futuristic Stories* or the *Pendulum New Worlds*, and was printed on better-quality paper, but it foundered under the burden of bad distribution and rationing after publishing its third issue in 1947. Gillings reverted to fanzine publication, again using his journalistic resources to obtain professional printing for what was first called *Fantasy Review* and later *Science Fantasy Review*. In 1950 Nova Publications undertook to take responsibility for this magazine too, converting it into a fiction magazine and contracting its name to *Science-Fantasy*. This unification of the sf community was quickly spoiled by dissent; the company was too small to support two editors. As paper-rationing was gradually phased out so, alas, was Gillings; he remained a fan until he died but who never lent his considerable expertise to another sf magazine until 1969-70, when Philip Harbottle's *Vision of Tomorrow* serialized his history of British fandom, "The Impatient Dreamers." *New Worlds* and *Science-Fantasy* both came under the control of Ted Carnell, who continued to edit them until 1964.

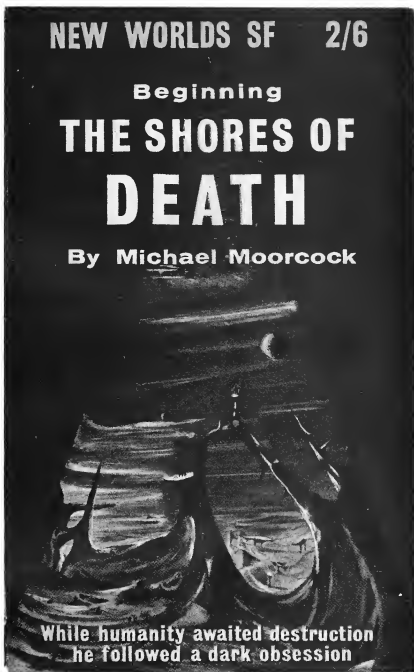
Although several other publishers began reprinting American sf magazines, confronting the Nova magazines with stiff competition, those which retained the pulp format foundered along with their American originals. Only those which were or became digests – most notably *Astounding*, *Galaxy* and (somewhat unsteadily) *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction* – outlasted the fifties.

In view of the earlier history of British sf one of the most surprising features of the Nova magazines was the complete absence, after the second issue of each, of John Russell Fearn. The indefatigable Fearn had found a new market, writing for the paperback publishers – who underwent explosive expansion as the restraints which had held them in check were relaxed.

He produced dozens of sf novels, most of them written for Scion as "Vargo Statten" and – later – "Volsted Gridban." These bizarre names arose because paperback publishers believed in fitting authors' names to the kind of fiction they were producing; thus, gangster stories had American tough-guy names attached and risqué romances bore French-sounding pseudonyms. For his own ill-fated pioneering line of sf novels Steve Frances devised the supposedly-appropriate house pseudonym "Astron del Martia"; his competitors, perhaps unfortunately, in view of the effect it had on the public image of sf, followed his absurd lead.

The new paperback publishers paid extremely low word rates; they could get away with it, because paper-rationing had left writers as hungry as readers. Nevertheless, they were a market of sorts, and for would-be professional sf writers like Fearn, Ted Tubb (the original Volsted Gridban) and Ken Bulmer they represented a window of opportunity. It was at this point in time that the tiny community of British pulp sf writers splintered. John Beynon Harris became John Wyndham and went on to respectability. Eric Frank Russell also steered clear of the new marketplace. Some of those who dabbled in the UK paperback puddle, like Tubb and Bulmer, were soon able to graduate to the bigger and more lucrative pond that was Don Wollheim's Ace Double line (in the USA). Others – including Fearn – got so completely stuck in the rut of fast, mechanical production that they never got out; they went down with the cheapjack paperback companies, which shrivelled and died one by one in the fierce competition which followed the end of paper rationing. (Although John Spencer Ltd, which published four ultra-cheap and utterly dire sf magazines in the early fifties before founding the infamous Badger Books, were kept afloat for an extra ten years by the extraordinary generosity – some might call it foolishness – of the amazing Lionel Fanthorpe. Fanthorpe persisted in mass-producing books for Badger at £22 10s a time long after everybody else had either given up or started demanding more money; his 180+ volumes included most of the 108 issues of *Supernatural Stories*).

One survivor of the post-war boom-and-bust was Hamilton & Co, parent firm of Panther Books. Like Scion and Curtis Warren (whose prolific sf output was mostly supplied by one Dennis Hughes under a dozen unlikely aliases), Hamilton went in for sf on a considerable scale. After killing *Futuristic Stories* and *Strange Adventures* they began an imitation of Fearn's Vargo Statten series, optimistically naming it the "Authentic Science Fiction Series." These appeared under



slightly more dignified pseudonyms – Lee Stanton, John J. Deegan, Roy Sheldon, etc. – than those used by their competitors, and some Hamilton authors, including Ken Bulmer and Bryan Berry, were actually allowed to use their own names on books which were given a slightly more upmarket image. The *Authentic* series was gradually transformed into a magazine by its editor Gordon Landsborough and the "technical editor," H.J. "Bert" Campbell, who was hired in order to give it a gloss of respectability.

Bert Campbell really was an authentic scientist – a career which he resumed in due course, publishing an excellent early book on *The Pleasure Areas*, the fascinating regions of rats' brains first discovered by James Olds – but his expertise did not add much

quality to his own sf, or that of most of the authors he published while he was in sole charge of *Authentic* from 1952-6. He was replaced by Ted Tubb, but the magazine was always a poor relation of the *Nova* magazines, and it eventually ceased publication in 1957.

The Scottish sf magazine *Nebula* also owed its existence to the economic opportunism of the post-war paperback boom. Its editor, Peter Hamilton, left school in 1952 just as his parents, who were the proprietors of a small printing firm, were contemplating branching out into publishing in order to keep their machines active while other business was slack. He volunteered to edit a line of sf novels for them, but quickly converted this into a magazine on the advice of his distributor. *Nebula* occupied the

idle time of the firm's machines between 1952 and 1959, thus justifying its existence in spite of its negligible profitability.

Scion also decided, when the boom petered out, that a magazine might be a better bet than a line of novels, and they launched the Vargo Statten Science Fiction Magazine in 1954. They tried to colonize a new niche in the already overcrowded field, beginning the magazine as a pulp aimed at juvenile readers. Fearn was not the original editor, but he was installed in that post by the new management when Scion went bust and were taken over. His cramped editorial budget meant that he could only pay half what the competition was offering, and the magazine never really stood a chance. It died after releasing 19 issues under a number of variant titles in 1956, and Fearn's career died with it. It was difficult by then to remember that he had once been the Great White Hope of British sf, regularly featured on the cover of *Astounding Stories of Super-Science* in the days when American editor F. Orlin Tremaine thought that he was a master of the "thought-variant."

**B**y 1960, only the Nova Publications magazines survived as original British publications, alongside the British editions of the leading US digests. Their rivals had all decided that the game was not worth the candle, and from a purely commercial point of view they were absolutely right. The profit to be made from sf magazines was by no means huge, and was far more easily made by reprinting US titles than by maintaining original British ones. On the other hand, the existence of a domestic market did make a big difference to the small community of British sf writers, and was a vital element in sustaining their careers at a time when opportunities for hardcover publication were scarce and paperback publication offered very limited rewards. The Nova magazines were of cardinal importance to the development of such writers as John Brunner, Brian Aldiss and J.G. Ballard, and Nebula retains the distinction of having published the first short stories of Aldiss, Bob Shaw and Robert Silverberg.

Nova Publications was not, in any real sense, a commercial operation. *New Worlds*, *Science Fantasy* and their eventual companion *Science Fiction Adventures*—a title inherited from a US magazine whose UK edition which Nova had taken on before it went bust, and subsequently elected to continue—made enough money to keep Ted Carnell alive, and enabled him to build up the literary agency which subsequently became his main business, but his continuing enthusiasm was such a vital pre-requisite for their survival that the company could not survive its eventual



waning, and the titles had to be sold.

In 1964 *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy* were acquired by Roberts & Vinter, who appointed Michael Moorcock and Kyril Bonfiglioli as the new editors. Both had radically new ideas about how the magazines could and ought to be transformed in order to bring a new respectability and literary ambition to British sf, freeing it at last from the legacy of ill-repute it had acquired by virtue of its downmarket origins in the post-war boom. (Roberts & Vinter were otherwise quite content to carry on that tradition, becoming the latest promulgators of the multi-faceted career of Hank Janson.) Moorcock—and Bonfiglioli's successors at *Impulse*, Keith Roberts and Harry Harrison—had made a solid beginning when the magazines were unfortunately killed by the shock-waves generated by the bankruptcy of their distributors, Thorpe & Porter.

It was the demise of Thorpe & Porter which also killed off the UK editions of the US magazines, but the gap which they left was easily and rapidly filled by imported copies of the US editions. It was not so easy to resurrect *New Worlds*, but the boundless enthusiasm of its new editor was equal to the task and *New Worlds* eventually reappeared in 1967, partly supported by an Arts Council grant, in a lavish new format. Moorcock's efforts on behalf of the publication were nothing less than Herculean, but they could not in the end maintain its existence in a determinedly hostile world. He might have succeeded in keeping the radically remodelled magazine going had not the major distributors W.H. Smith and John Menzies refused to circulate it during a pettifogging moral panic about bad language in Norman Spinrad's *Bug Jack Barron*, but that final blow was crippling.

The name *New Worlds* had by then acquired such symbolic meaning that it stubbornly refused to die, but its

most recent incarnations—including its present one—have not been magazines. Whether the present paperback version will be able to resist assassination by the logic of the marketplace remains to be seen, but the track record of the many original anthology series which have been launched so hopefully during the last twenty years offers little grounds for optimism.

**S**o it goes—and so it goes on. Year in and year out new enthusiasts come forward, with missionary fervour, to found new British sf magazines. Somewhere on that economic margin, they feel certain, there must be money to be made—or, if not, there must at least be the opportunity to survive, without losing so much that it will become impossible to continue to serve the cause. And so it is, after all, a cause as well as—or perhaps rather than—a publishing category. Even those who pounded the stuff out in the early '50s for next-to-nothing, with little hope of ever raising themselves from the literary gutter, had stars in their eyes.

*Interzone*, like all its predecessors and all the other sf magazines—including the so-called "semi-professional" magazines—which exist alongside it, owes its existence to the simple determination of the people who produce it. None of these people draws a living wage; in effect, they pay for the privilege of doing what they do. What they do is important not only to themselves, but to all the people whose work finds an outlet in their pages. The writers who appear in *Interzone* do not make more than a tiny fraction of their income from their sales, but that fraction is more important than the marginal difference it makes to their bank balances; a magazine is a display window, a training ground, and something of which one can be proud to be a part.

Every essay in economic history really ought to end with an explicit acknowledgement of the fact that money is, after all, merely a symbol, and not the only possible or credible system of valuation. It makes the wheels of industry go round, but it cannot determine where the carriage will or ought to go.

As products go, sf has a lot to be said for it: it doesn't kill anybody, it doesn't use up much in the way of non-renewable resources, it doesn't create much waste, it's mostly fun, and it offers food for thought which is occasionally nourishing as well as flavoured.

There will probably be many more British sf magazines in time to come, but it's highly probable that none of them will ever make any real money. Let's hope that there will always be people who are prepared to produce them anyway. And let's hope that no more Adolf Hitlers will emerge to make things even worse than they'd otherwise be.

(Brian Stableford)

**T**here was no note, no explanation.

Elisabet closed the door behind the Express deliveryman, shutting out the cries of children playing in the winter afternoon. She sat on the velvet stepstool in her foyer and stared at the tiny Daydot, encased in its clear plastic file. It was the sole contents of the envelope; the sixth such delivery in six days.

The Daydot was violet. Hers had always been violet, Daniel's, green. It made them easy to tell apart.

The phone rang, stopped, rang again, stopped. She didn't move.

She held the Daydot up to the light and squinted, but couldn't see the microscopically small smudge of black which should be on its edge, the date and time. None. As lacking in qualifiers as the previous five.

She remembered arranging, not two years ago, the manufacture of these plastic holders. How excited she and Daniel had been to be getting Daydots, Inc. off the ground then after years of thought, research and hard work. To help people relive hours, even days, which were long past. To reveal to them the intensity of a day of childhood, or help them unearth the roots of a phobia. They had celebrated by splitting a bottle of good Chardonnay and making love.

And now she was married to Tim.

Daniel had claimed all credit for their invention after that. And all the money too. Of course, these Daydots had to be from him.

Elisabet took a deep, shuddering breath. "Enough of this," she said.

She stalked into the kitchen, shoved the Daydot into the trash can, and went back to her office to mosey her latest segment of work to Pasadena.

Among her library of reference cd's and her diplomas, she began to feel better. The knowledge with which she'd calibrated the essential neurological formulas which underlay Daydot theory could be used in many ways. As a consultant for thinktanks, she was establishing a good reputation and commanding substantial, if too occasional, fees for her work in the fledgling field which she and Daniel had helped focus, Neurobiotics.

But it was only a fraction of the money she would be making if Daniel hadn't ripped her off. She still couldn't understand how he could justify it. Well, let him have it. She wouldn't stoop to fighting him for it in court. Besides, she'd been advised that it would be long, expensive, and that she could very well lose.

**W**hen Tim came home, she was stuffing homemade manicotti. Cooking usually soothed her, but today half the cylinders had broken.

"Why do you bother?" Tim asked, flicking on the light. "You always get so upset when they break, and they always do."

His serious eyes, sheltered under epicanthic folds, were deep blue; his chin-length hair resolutely black, utterly straight. She pushed it back from his face and kissed him lightly.

"I guess I was hoping you'd be back tonight, even though you said it might be another day," she said. He was a consulting engineer for a large Japanese-American firm and travelled frequently.

He glanced at the trash can. "Another one?" he asked.





She pulled the plastic Daydot file from the garbage and shook off coffee grounds. Silly to be so emotional. "There was no message with this one either," she said.

"You can't keep running from him, Elisabet."

"That's what I hate about you," said Elisabet, pulling him toward her by hooking her fingers into his belt loop. "You're so goddamned sensible."

"I mean it," he said. "You have to work through this."

"You don't know him," she said. "I didn't know him, until I left him for you. I had no idea that there was so much rage in him. For that matter, I didn't even know he cared. He's a very complicated man."

"People are complicated," said Tim.

She had to agree. Even as she relaxed into his hug her mind was racing among the remembered sharp edges of Daniel's being. A lot of goodness. And a lot of unpleasantness as well.

As Tim slid the manicotti into the oven, she picked up the file again. What day was it?

Daydots had to be made individually. Each person required precise chemical analysis, extensive study of brainwave patterns. During the first years of developing models, prototypes, and parameters, when they'd experimented on themselves, it had been easy to overshoot days, to careen back to drooling babyhood or painful adolescence.

They'd found that the memories triggered took the same amount of time as they had originally, so the user had to prepare herself. How long might this one last?

She smelled garlic and looked up to see Tim making salad dressing. He asked, "Going to try it? I'll be home all day tomorrow." He meant he could take care of her, talk with her afterwards, soothe her back into their present. "You really ought to."

Daniel had her entire profile on computer – something no customer could presently afford, though refinements in the technology might bring the price down later. All he had to do was choose. What horrible memory would he want to put her through? One of their many raging fights?

"What for?" she asked.

"Aren't you curious?"

"I already know that he hates me."

"Then why are you keeping them?" He was referring to the other five she had received, carefully labeled in her leather Daydot flipfile.

"Evidence. I think. Maybe one day I'll decide to fight."

Tim's smile was sad. "You still care about him, Elisabet. There's so much weird pain there –" he shrugged, then reached over and carefully shut a cupboard door. "I'm just selfish. I think things would be better for us if you could really get in there and push."

"Don't you think I have?" she flared. "What do you think I've been doing with the therapist this past year?"

He turned, and his eyes, utterly serious, pinned her. "I'm just saying there are some things you can only do alone, sweet-heart. That's all. He wants to start a dialogue. You should at least tell him you got them."

"The only dialogue I want with him is a cheque. An acknowledgment that we developed Daydots together."

"I wonder if he's even making any money yet," said

Tim. "They're still much too expensive. He only got FDA approval last week, anyway."

"So? He had money from the early Asian sales when I left. Once the public trusts the technology, I think a lot of people will build libraries of Daydots. I've seen articles already. The world is very interested. Don't you want us to have some of the profits?"

"I want you to be happy," he said. "Do you think oodles of money will do that?"

"It wouldn't hurt, would it?"

"That's not the real problem and you know it. You still feel guilty. And angry. You just can't end ten years so abruptly. It took me at least four years to get over my divorce from Alycia. Those loose ends will get you every time."

"It smells like the manicotti's ready," she said. "Let's eat."

It was the new ad on the radio that sent her to the lawyer.

Not for money. For clarity. For resolution. For revenge? Admit you're human, her therapist always told her. You don't have to be perfect.

All right. I won't be. Not any more. It's too much work to even try. Sue the bastard.

**E**lisabet switched on the tape and set the recorder on the desk of William Haverly, Esquire. She wondered how much Daniel had paid the ad people. She hated it. It made her think he was really losing his marbles. And that would be her fault too, right? Everything else was. His life was ruined without her – his parting words still rang in her mind.

"Choose to relive a day – the day of your choice – for only fifty thousand dollars. Choose a week, for a quarter million. It's easy, it's painless, and completely risk-free. Imagine, those treasured experiences yours forever, and now new technologies shorten your using time. Call now! The toll-free number is –"

"He might as well be advertising Veg-O-Matics instead of Daydots," Elisabet complained as she shut it off. How could she have ever felt close to Daniel, close enough to feel like his twin, close enough to create Daydots with him? What had happened? She felt her chest contract with depression.

I don't miss him. I don't miss the fun. I sure don't miss the drivenness...

"Bad taste is not a crime," Haverly said. "And since you let him file all the papers in his name without looking them over first –"

"I trusted him," she said, starting to feel angry again. Especially when her mind echoed Tim's reasoned explanation: He trusted you.

"Always a mistake," observed Haverly. "Work things out on paper beforehand."

"I thought we did," she said.

Haverly looked at her over the top of his glasses. "Dr Sennler, I'm going to do my best to help you get your share of whatever Dr Weston makes by marketing this Daydot concept in this fashion –"

"It's not a concept," she said. "It works. You live each nuance of memory. Only you have all your memories since, as well, so it's like going back and –"

"Yes, yes," said Haverly. Elisabet wondered if the discomfort on his face was actually fear. So many people were terrified by the idea.

"But you have paid back all your investors," he continued.

When Elisabet spoke, he wrote on his yellow pad. "Down to a workable level," she said. "It took millions, of course." Bitterness flooded her again. "We were able to sell some of the by-products of our work before the final Daydot process was perfected – a new magnetic resonance imager, for example. This new technology he's talking about – whatever it is – is based on work that I did."

"Yes," he said, and made a note. "What was your role in developing Daydots?"

Elisabet felt the stab of pain. "It's hard to say, exactly. We thought like one person. At least, that's what it seemed like to me. I developed the formulas which take into account variations in individual brain chemistry. I also got investors to believe in what we were doing. We both wore a lot of hats, interchangeably. It's like that when you have the same vision, the same background, the same skills..." Until it gets to be too much, this twin stuff, too close, too intense, when the smallest change in one of you gets magnified all out of proportion, and it all cracks apart. And sometimes, she thought wryly, you crack right apart with it. Thank God for Tim. She relaxed.

"How did you meet?" Haverly asked.

"He was my professor. Well, actually, he was just an instructor, finishing up his PhD. I wasn't far behind, but he always kept that superior attitude, like, I'll always be ahead of you."

"Hmm. This is the worst kind of case. So many emotional entanglements. You don't have any records."

"No. He changed the locks on the lab and the condo. Refused to talk."

"Perhaps we can subpoena them. I'll get in touch with him. Or his attorney. I guess that's all for now."

As Elisabet rode the elevator down, she was surprised when she started crying. "That son-of-a-bitch," she said, but had the tears wiped away by the time she got to the lobby.

Several days later, Elisabet was cleaning the kitchen with the news on. She heard Daniel's name and whirled to study the tiny picture on her countertop tv.

Smoke billowed out of the top floor of the city's most prestigious condominium building. Had it only been two years since she had lived there with Daniel?

The smoke looked as if it were coming from their – his – window. Far below, on the sidewalk, the "Save Time Foundation" chanted and picketed. Their spokesman loudly claimed responsibility as police handcuffed him. Elisabet never had understood their concern. What did reliving memories have to do with changing the nature of time?

Then Daniel emerged from the building. The camera person rushed in for a tight shot. Give us a little wallow in grief, she thought, anger flicking through her. She was shocked at the pain on his face. Then she understood.

He held Spots in his arms. The dog was limp, eyes staring, held open by death. A large open burn oozed across most of the dog's side.

"How do you feel about this, Dr Weston?" asked the reporter.



Illustrations by Ben Mozar

"Fuck off," he said, and started to cry, standing on the cold street corner in his shirtsleeves, holding the dog he had surprised her with several years ago.

Elisabet turned off the tv and leaned against the counter, feeling sick.

Daniel might have died as well.

She went to the bedroom and opened the top drawer of her bureau. The now-ten Daydots Daniel had sent her were in back of her flipfile. The last one had come yesterday.

She still didn't want to do them. She'd always been more discriminating about such things than Daniel. He called her controlling. She preferred the word careful.

She found what she was looking for in a batch toward the end where she kept days that had been particularly important to her, pulled it out, and paused.

Just one? She could arrange a chain by using layers of film which dissolved at a very precise rate upon contact with skin. That way, one after another would kick in.

But she hadn't used any Daydots in a long time. Probably one was all she could handle.

She lay down on the bed and applied it to her neck, ready for time-lapse retroactive chemical extrapolation. A thousand times more precise than hypnosis.

Being there.

Knowing it.

When Elisabet opened the front door, the puppy waddled up to her on short, fat legs. Daniel was behind her, smiling.

"She's for you," he said.

From her new vantage point, where she knew what

was going to happen, Elisabet watched through the old Elisabet's veil of emotions – surprise, delight. Now, she thought – what a different gesture for Daniel. So unusually demonstrative.

She was entirely in her body, but it was like wearing old, familiar clothing. She couldn't change what was happening. She could only observe.

"Oh, Daniel," she said, and picked it up. She felt the puppy's rough tongue as it frantically licked her face; smelled the mixture of puppy smells. "She's so cute. I just love her!"

"I hope so," he said. She noticed, now, that his voice was gruff and low, and that his eyes, in a brief glance, held a plea she hadn't seen at the time. She had told him a few days before that she was seeing Tim. He hadn't said much about it.

He went on in a lighter tone. "She's going to be a lot of fun. She fell right into her bowl of oatmeal this morning. I had a heck of a time getting her cleaned up. I was hoping you'd hurry home. What did you think of those figures I showed you yesterday?" Now his thin face was happy, open; his light brown hair fell across his grey eyes and he pushed it back. Elisabet wished she hadn't looked into them for such a long moment; she was shaken, in her present, by their light.

"Oh," she said. "I just made one little change." She put the puppy down and went through her briefcase, pulled out a sheet of paper. "Here. I just changed one coefficient."

"Good," he said, and took the paper from her.

There was the smooth, soothing interface, and then she opened her eyes.

Just one coefficient. All he had to do was look at this day, and he'd know how essential she had been. Maybe she should tell him what day to look at via Haverly. Why not? But really, all he had to do was try any day...

Spots was dead.

She wished Tim were home.

Three days after the fire, Haverly called Elisabet. "It's about Daniel," he said, hesitantly. "What about him?" asked Elisabet. She put one hand over her free ear. Tim was unloading the dishwasher noisily.

"It's rather strange. He's in a new condo now. That's where I'm calling from. Before the fire I sent him a letter concerning the requests we talked about. Yesterday he sent me a key and directions. In case I needed it to get in, he said, and asked me to come to his place because he didn't have time to come to my office. It seemed odd but I was busy and didn't give it much thought. Well, I'm here now, for our meeting, and I did have to use the key. He wouldn't answer the doot."

Elisabet tried to ignore the twinge of nervousness in her gut. "You're at Daniel's? How is he?"

"He appears to be passed out on the couch. But he's breathing. I don't know what to do. Call an ambulance?"

Elisabet sighed. "I give up."

"What?"

"He's won. Where are you?"

Elisabet opened the door to Daniel's new condo cautiously, and stepped inside. She saw, through the vestibule, that he was lying on the couch, the only piece of furniture besides the lamp. She walked in. Haverly was sitting crosslegged on the floor.

"Don't touch him," she said, as Haverly reached over and put a thumb on Daniel's eyelid.

"I wanted to show you –"

"Just don't. It's a Daydot trance. It's very unpleasant to be disturbed."

Haverly stood. "All right. I don't understand how these dot things work. I've never seen anyone in a day trance before. It's rather unsettling."

"Well," Elisabet said, "it needn't be. It all takes place in the mind. And it's just straight memories – we've never changed past days. So far, we really couldn't, because... well, just the concept involves a million problems. I mean, theoretically, you could change memories – create a new hallucination, in effect – but the technology won't be at that level for quite some time, in my opinion." That had been her pet. She had completely abandoned her work on that, and all her records, when she'd fled. Foolish, really, but she hadn't ever been able to bring herself to ask for all that back, and Daniel had never contacted her. Until those Daydots began to arrive...

She studied Daniel's defenceless face and felt concern. Only concern, she told herself. She didn't feel an iota of responsibility, much less love. Of course not. She should hate him for being such an asshole. But it was only the last year when things started to go haywire, when there was all that pressure. Maybe she should have given it more time...

"Tell me a for instance," Haverly said. "What if he came here from some future day and relived this day?"

"Well, it would just be like frames. That's what we used to call them – day frames. He'd go back to whatever day he's doing now, but with additional information. The things he saw might take on a whole new meaning."

"He's got some hefty lawsuits against him, I read in the record the other day. In a way, you're lucky not to be involved with him."

"Lawsuits?" she asked, surprised.

"The Save Time Foundation gets money from all over the world. And a whole new branch of the law is opening up." He was getting excited. "Think about this: who should pay for a Daydot which may help clear or convict someone? Is it the responsibility of the state? Or simply the prerogative of rich individuals?"

"I'm just a scientist," she said. "I've been kind of out of touch lately. But there's no way anybody out here can get at that information, so whether or not the individual would relay it truthfully is up to him or her. The biochemistry of memory is absolutely unique to the individual. That's why it's so expensive. Of course, if you used someone else's Daydots those chemicals would probably evoke something – but it would probably be garbled, like a bad dream, except terribly real."

"I guess that's what they're afraid is going to happen on the streets." Haverly said. "Just one more drug problem. If the technology should fall into the wrong hands –"

"It's too expensive," she said. "This isn't like synthesizing LSD in your basement lab, or growing pot in your closet. You need a roomful of multimillion-dollar machines. You need —" she heard her voice turn wry — "Daniel's patented process. It's so finely tuned, and it took so much work, I just don't see anyone else coming up with it very easily."

Haverly looked at Daniel. "Don't you think we ought to call a doctor or something?"

"I imagine he comes out of it from time to time. Probably every few hours." A huge collection of Day-dots were spilled onto the carpet next to the magnifying glass he used to read the dates. "What a mess," she said. What was he doing?

So many days together. He had thousands to choose from. So did she. That must be why she still felt this ache.

Haverly put some papers on the kitchen counter. "Do you think he'll see them here?" he asked.

"I guess," she said.

She let Haverly leave first. He turned and pressed a key into her hand. "He sent one for you."

"I don't want it."

"You do whatever you like with it. I have to give it to you."

She closed the door behind her.

There was a note from Tim when she got home. "Trouble with the Philadelphia job. Don't know when I'll be back. Tonight, probably. I love you. Tim."

I love you.

That message had accompanied Daniel's last Day-dot, the tenth one. She had assumed that he had given up. Now she realized that the fire, and Haverly, had probably interrupted the flow.

Five minutes later she was sitting on the bed, the first dot Daniel had sent in her hand. Coward, she thought. Do it. Work through it. Get it over with.

Then: Don't be silly. Remember how hateful he was. He just wants to mess with your mind. Don't let him.

But how does one erase ten years?

You're imagining the loneliness and pain on the face you looked at today. Why did she wish she had touched it?

She looked at the clock, lay back, and put the patch on her neck. It was 5:03.

**A** blur of green, red, yellow resolved into the shirts of children. The oak floor, disorientingly close, was cluttered with toys. The clack of high heels, a door slamming. Her breath coming faster and faster, her wordless voice hoarse with pain each time.

A round face with grave blue eyes. She had bright yellow hair, bangs and a pony tail. "You'll be okay," she said. "Your mommy will come back. It's sad at first sometimes. I used to cry too. Want to play blocks with me?"

The scream which burst from her released shards of darkness. The scene blurred with tears. Her knees and elbows hurt when she flung herself on the floor and started to kick. "Mommy," she screamed. A firm hand grabbed her upper arm and dragged her to her feet. "She'll be back," the woman said.

Her hand swept out, punched; knocked glasses off the lady's face. They clattered to the floor.

"No," the lady yelled, her voice harsh, and started to spank her. "No, Danny."



She screamed louder with each blow, until her throat hurt. "I hate you. I hate you. I hate you."

No interface. She was wrenched right into the present, into the glaring lamplight, trembling, stiff with the rage of being abandoned and beaten when she protested. Mommy had no right to leave her!

She wiped the sweat from her forehead, noticed the time readout. 5:04. Impossible. That fragment should have taken at least five minutes, maybe ten. Not one. She must not be remembering correctly.

But that wasn't the worst of it. The knowledge seeped into her gradually, because she was so disoriented.

It wasn't her memory.

Could it be something she'd repressed? Something too painful to remember? Because she knew that she'd never felt anything so devastating in her life, angry as she had been with Daniel. This was so raw.

But she had never been to a preschool. She was the youngest, Mommy's little girl, kept home until she was school age. A happy time for her, bright, secure.

She turned on her side, punched the pillow, stared at the Chinese print on the wall.

It couldn't be Daniel's memory. There was no way to trade off like that, no way to have the full flavour of another's past. The triggerings and events were so intimate, so absolutely personal.

So why did the woman call you Danny?

She let the tears come then, tears for the humiliation, the anger, the desolation of being left there alone, with that horrible woman. Where mommy would never come back. Never rescue her.

Of course, Elisabet knew Daniel's mother had

returned. The divorce hadn't occurred until he was seven. Not until she had locked him in closets, left him in parks, screamed at him until she was blue in the face just for being alive.

But the Daniel she had just been didn't believe that she would ever come back. His torturer was also his only loved one.

Why? she asked. Why have you done this, Daniel? And how? And why did it take no time?

She went through dot after dot. They didn't take long. But the aftermath did, the digestion of terror and pain, and then the ninth one, the one that had her in tears.

The one where he met her, and the joy he felt.

After that, she lay there for ten minutes. She didn't know if she could do the last one. She couldn't. She just couldn't.

The phone rang. She remembered the clicks on her answering machine the past few days. She never answered the phone while she was working.

Daniel. Daniel had been trying to reach her.

She picked it up.

"Dr Sennerlo?" It was Haverly.

"Drop it," she said.

"What?"

"Drop the case."

He was silent for a moment. Then he said, "We can talk about that later. Right now, I'm kind of worried. Something rather curious has happened. I thought you might like to know. I - ah - well, Dr Weston apparently woke, and left a message on my machine. He was quite agitated. I gathered that he had spent several hours looking over the papers I left."

"Yes?"

"Do you think that he's capable of understanding those legal papers? I mean -"

"I'm sure he got the gist of it quite well," she said.

"Well, he kept asking for you. Begging for you. Said you wouldn't talk to him. I wonder if he's all right," Haverly said.

"I'll take care of it," she said.

"What do you intend to do?" he asked. "I strongly advise you not to become directly involved. I think that you ought to call some sort of health-care professional. He really sounds - well, to be frank, he sounded kind of crazy. Kind of desperate."

"Thanks for the advice."

"Follow it," he said. "And please call me and let me know what you do."

She hung up.

It was dusk. Outside, the suburbs were leafless, the lawns sodden patches of yellow transversed by muddy paths made by children. Across the street a neighbour turned on her porchlight and came outside; she hugged herself against the chill. Elisabet heard her call for her children, her voice a dim bleat of sound through the closed window.

So normal.

She wanted to call Tim, but he was probably on the train. And he had been urging her to confront this problem, to deal with it. That was the wonderful thing about him. Nothing was closed off. What a contrast to her life with Daniel - constricted, controlled, at his insistence, all subsumed into their single goal of actually producing Daydots. Until she had freaked.

She got up, pulled on her shoes and coat. She

gathered up the dots he'd sent, stuck them back in her flipfile, and put it in her bag. She didn't want to, but she *had* to talk to him about them. Tim was right. So much pain there. Best to face it head-on, deal with it.

She walked to the Metro a mile away, where the housing development merged into a scattering of shops and banks, and got on the train to Daniel's new place.

**T**he condo was dark. Outside the plate glass window a thin moon was visible between skyscrapers. The lights of traffic far below made her think of stars moving on a fixed, straight path toward some unseen goal.

Bracing herself, she switched on the single lamp.

Daniel was sprawled on the floor among a pile of Daydots worth the economy of a small country.

She sighed and knelt next to him. A chain of dots dappled his neck. She shook him. He groaned. His head turned slack to the side. No surprise. How many times had she seen him like this before? There was really no danger.

Next to his left hand on the carpet was a piece of folded paper. She picked it up.

A translucent Daydot sat careless in the crease. The note said, "Please try this sequence for me, and this Daydot last. I've developed a new technique that makes it all much cleaner and clearer. I think it will reduce costs too. See if you like it. I sent you some messages. Some samples. I've been working very hard, you see. I guess you didn't try them. I don't blame you. I've read Haverly's papers and I agree: half will be yours. There. You have it in writing. It can even *all* be yours, if that's what it takes to make you forgive me. I know you love Tim. I accept that now. Maybe we can work together again, Elisabet. I hope you say that we can."

She sank onto the soft carpet, crossing her legs. How lonely it must be for Daniel here. No Spots now. Don't feel guilty, her new mind said, but her laugh was a short, harsh ejection of sound. How not to?

She steeled herself. Daniel's life had been horrible. It wasn't her fault. But it explained a lot.

Maybe, if she finished this final segment with him, she'd understand more. Maybe together they could work on some new healing for him, for themselves. So they could get on with their lives. Tim was right. This was Daniel's way of communicating. She had to try and listen. She understood so much more now.

She opened her bag and took out the flipfile of days.

There were directions in his note, like a game of hopscotch. Odd days scattered through several years. A puzzle of references. She saw that he'd laid those days out for her, but she'd brought her own, thank you.

She applied them to her neck one by one, each with the precise number of microscopically thin interface layers which would regulate their timing.

Then she took his final, new one and lay down, next to Daniel. Her hand crept over and touched his slack fingers.

**"W**here are those patent papers anyway?" Daniel yelled. He thrashed through the debris on his desk, swept half of it

onto the floor, and slumped back into his chair.

She felt herself shake her head, experienced the thought which was more like a mental rolling of eyes than anything verbal, and opened "her" drawer – the drawer she'd insisted on after witnessing the surrealistic horror of Daniel's stack-and-scatter method of dealing with any information not directly related to labwork. "Here," she said, pulling the patent application out of its file. "You hid it from me," he accused. But he smiled.

"You bet," she said. "Otherwise we'd have to send away for a new one. All right." She handed it to him. "Are you ready to fill it out?"

As she watched him walk into the other room to do so, her helpless pain grew. She knew now what he was going to do.

Then the Daydot was up. The next one automatically synched in. She felt the orienting "jolt," then time slowed to its customary speed.

She didn't need a Daydot to remember this day. She doubted Daniel did either.

He was smoking his fourth cigarette in fifteen minutes, sitting in a chair with his back toward her.

"What about Tim?" he asked.

"What about him? I mentioned six months ago I was seeing someone." The day before he had filled out those patent papers, she had bitterly realized later. "You and I never had any sort of agreement. I didn't think you cared, Daniel."

"That shows how much you know."

"You should have said something."

"And you're getting married."

"Yes."

What is he leading up to? she wondered in the dark, soothing interface. At least these days were hers. Not those horrible, wrenching days lived by a helpless, lonely, sensitive boy.

**"H**ere it is!" Daniel sliced open an envelope and pulled the paper out. "Infinity, Inc. – that is, you and me – is now the owner of the Daydot patent." He hugged her. "Home free! Elisabeth, we'll be rich!"

She watched her own amused complacency with puzzlement. She didn't remember this ever happening. It was Daydots. Daydots, Inc.

As she thought it, Daniel looked at her piercingly.

"Here," he said, "let's take a little Daydot journey to celebrate. Remember our trip to San Francisco? The honeymoon suite at the Sir Francis Drake?" He opened a tiny jewelled box and took out two dots, balanced each on the end of separate fingers. One violet, one green.

She glanced down at her wedding ring, and it wasn't the one she and Tim had picked out, a slim, oddly twisted band which matched his. This was foreign, ornate, heavy.

Elisabet wanted to run. Knock the Daydots out of Daniel's hand; spit on them. You can't do this, she thought, but she couldn't do anything except nod at Daniel and smile.

They had never had a honeymoon suite at the Sir Francis.

The patent was not in both their names. He had filled out all the forms in his name only, and she had blithely signed at the X without looking them over.



She realized that he believed, absolutely and completely, that she would be immeasurably happier with him here, in this invented life, than in her own. And that it shouldn't be up to her, anyway. It should be entirely, completely up to him.

As Daniel carefully applied the Daydot to her neck, he was kissing her deeply. She was kissing him back, but felt nothing but dark, formless, intense fear. She opened her eyes and was surprised to see that his were filled with tears.

"Don't worry, Elisabet," he said, and gently pushed her hair back. "It will be a lovely day, our honeymoon. It will be all I ever wanted for us. I just didn't know how to tell you, I guess. It will be a beautiful life, just as we planned it together so long ago."

There were never any plans from you, she thought. No matter how much I wanted them.

"I'm sorry about the patent. I was just insane. Tim was as much my fault as yours. But we can try again. Now I know how. We'll never have to go back. We'll never even have to remember it." He looked at her quite directly. She tried to speak, but couldn't. He put his hand against her lips and shook his head, smiling.

"I know you by heart, my love. I know every nuance of your being. You and I have the most thoroughly catalogued brain chemistry on the planet. I can recreate any memory with the data I have, you know." He looked away, then looked back, held his breath, then spoke. "I can create memories. I've been working on this for a year. And do you know the curious thing? Memories, you know, take no time at all. A day in here is an instant outside, less than an instant, now that I've figured out this new approach."

That's because they're not memories, she tried to say. But couldn't. They're more like dreams. Except, apparently, concrete. Repeatable. With all the physical adjuncts that make up reality for us.

He went on.

"The old method was so confining. This is what my life has been about from the beginning. I've just realized it. Stay with me, Elisabet. Please." There was naked pleading in his voice, on his face. "Please," he whispered. "I love you so much. This way we can be together. Always. I know we can, I've worked on it so hard this past year. It's all I've done. This is real, Elisabet. Trust me. You'll know it too, soon, just as I do. I'm here as I really am. Not the way I was back there. This is the only way." He smiled, and she saw by the way he smiled: he thought she had no choice.

She tried to shout no, but no sound came out.

She pushed herself away from him, out of his arms which grabbed and grasped, away from his face so yearning, so beseeching. It took tremendous effort to raise her own arm, leaden and heavy in this new hybrid time, and pull the Daydot off, going against all the horror and power Daniel had programmed it; to wake, through layers of days, to this final day, this final time, where Daniel lay beside her on the condo floor.

She sat up and sobbed, hard, harsh sobs wrenched from the heart of the new memories, the new kind of memories, which thronged about her, the flavour of Daniel's most avid and touching dreams about her, the core of the love – if you could call it love – with which he'd hoped to bind her.

She rolled on her side and looked out the floor-to-

ceiling plate glass. A soft slow calliope of red airplane lights pulsed above the row of skyscrapers.

How had Daniel done it?

It was simple. He was a genius. He knew what he wanted to do.

Suddenly, she realized what his intent had been. "We'll never have to come back." She turned, pushed back his hair, ripped two Daydots off his neck, then stopped.

His skin was cold. She felt his wrist, his neck again. Nothing.

She was halfway to the phone to call an ambulance before she returned, knelt, ripped the rest of the Daydots off, swept them together with the ones on the floor, and took them to a back room. She folded his note and stuck it in her pocket. When the coroner came, she didn't want Daydots to be the cause of death. She suspected that "stroke" would be on the death certificate. Certainly, he had died of a stroke. Complete, absolute overload.

But first, he'd lived forever.

And had tried to kill her in the process. Rage blossomed as she realized this. Well, he had lived out his new, perfect infinity without her, thank God.

And yet...

She paused as she reached for the phone. How could she know that for certain? That something else had not gone awry? That he had not, perhaps, planned for one or more exigences?

She sat down slowly. Her calculations had certainly revealed such possibilities.

She had created a map for him.

She shivered; looked out the window at the immense, light-starred city. Was it the one she'd left less than an hour ago?

Elisabet pushed cool plastic buttons, her own phone number. She listened to the ringing on the line, hoping desperately that her former world, her real world, the one she had worked hard to build and love, would answer.

And keep answering.

Forever.



**Kathleen Ann Goonan** lives in Florida. Her credits include three sales to Asimov's, three to *Strange Plasma*, and one story each to *Pulphouse*, *Amazing* and *Die, Elvis, Die!* (the last-named being an anthology edited by Paul Sammon). She has also written travel articles for the *Washington Post* and elsewhere.



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# Mutant Popcorn

## Film Reviews by Nick Lowe

Ten years or so back, in the early days of the artform, there used to be a video game called, I think, *Star Chess*. It followed pretty much the rules of regular chess, at least as regards the way pieces move and capture. The one inspired modification was that each piece was armed with high-explosive laser cannon, so that if, say, your opponent put pressure on your exposed pawn by castling long in the Rauzer variation of the Sicilian Defence, you could just tug the joystick and bring out your queen EEEEEO-O-WWWW, with your trigger fingers going into tremolo reflex on the fire button, and totally blow that sucker off the board. Needless to say, this almost imperceptibly subtle tweak to the traditional gameplan forced some quite significant revisions to strategy, quite apart from speeding play up a bit. At the time, I really thought it was the future.

And *Bill and Ted's Bogus Journey* is essentially the *Star Chess* edition of Dante. Having successfully subjugated the whole of human history past and present to their incorrigible south-Californian worldpicture in their first outing, the unflappably dimwitted twosome move on up to address any remaining heavy concepts that might benefit from their attentions. Fortunately, there's just enough candidates to fill a sequel – death, eternity, the judgment of souls, the meaning of life, the future of civilization – so our heroes sportingly opt to take on the lot. The first is fairly easy game, given that B&T are far too bouncy to be deterred from their crazy adventures merely by being horribly murdered and their bodies left to rot. ("Dinner's over, worm dude," quips a cheery Ted as he fishes one out of his dead ear.)

Hell is similarly a pushover, as there's nothing here that hasn't been amply covered in Metallica lyrics. ("Choose your eternity!" booms the fallen one. "Choose your own, you fag!") And the rest are even more effortlessly disposed. In fact, the one seriously challenging concept the lads have to face, and clearly a much more soul-threatening scene than death or damnation, is personal failure to achieve their driving dream of making it as the greatest rock 'n' roll band in the history



From '*Bill & Ted's Bogus Journey*' (Orion)

of the world and getting into their hair-color-coded girlfriends' virgin panties. How, they ponder, can it be that, five years on from being promised all this as their manifest destiny, they're still a pair of talentless deadbeats living on junk eats and wittering away in the same old juvenile argot? Can your dreams lie? Now that might get really creepy. Fortunately, unlike most of their real-world kinsfolk, Bill and Ted have history on their side, and (after a string of ever dafter ending twists culminating in the most preposterous rubber-mask revelation in film history) Wyld Stallyns do indeed rock on to eternal glory and the Princess babes duly drop their knickers.

*B&T2* is a model sequel. The original writers have been kept on, paid well, and worked ridiculously hard, and have come up with a continuation that discards virtually nothing of the original cast and storyline while systematically escalating all the entertainment concepts. Perhaps because the Matheson-Solomon team's lived a long time with these characters, they've done more daring things than a reflex sequel would admit: jumped the heroes' story five years ahead in two, held on to virtually all the throwaway characters and subplots, flirted with some sur-

prisingly dark and (by biz standards) hard-to-sell themes, and packed the plot thick with cross-references and pick-ups from the first film. Most of the original time-travel scenario has been boldly sidelined – except for a few deft paradoxes, mainly clustered at the end, that bear proud witness to Chris Matheson's professional breeding.

The characters are perhaps a tad less fresh and amiable this time around; but the gags are astonishingly good, and even more than the first film the script just bubbles with beautifully-crafted lines ("My son and his friend Ted have been murdered and replaced by evil robots from the future," &c.). The ironic edge is sharper than ever and, best of all, the ending wraps up the whole imbroglia so utterly that there is not the slightest possibility of Bill & Ted ever returning to our reality – just as well, given the rapidly widening salary differential between the good-looking tall one and the funny-looking character-actor-type dwarfish one. Oh yes, and if you look closely at the final headline in the closing newspaper montage, the one where Wyld Stallyns bring world peace, you'll notice that the same front page carries an end column headline reading "Kurds Kill 19



From 'Highway to Hell' (Sovereign Pictures)

Iraqis In Clashes." Still, I expect the magic of rock'n'roll will soon enough sort them out.

Quality of jokes is only one of the striking contrasts between *Bill & Ted* and the more traditional infernal commedia of *Highway to Hell*: a fairly witless, but not unenjoyable, teen road fantasy about an eloping couple who take the Wrong Exit in their beat-up Pinto and wind up on the road to Hell City, where she (Kristy Swanson, the professional bimbo out of *Mannequin on the Move*) catches the roving eye of evil incarnate (Patrick Bergin, needless to say) and has to be salvaged from a cheesy update of Persephone's fate-worse-than-damnation by a rather hit-and-miss update of the usual catabasis motifs – get past the monsters, yield not to temptation, and don't look back on the homeward drive. (You think there's going to be a gag with the driver's mirror, but it's another trick missed).

Unlike *B&T*, *Highway to Hell* rashly

tries to preserve some kind of rudimentary moral angle to the whole scenario – yielding a pretty forlorn Halloweenish homily on the perils of premarital teenage sex, complete with a harlot's couch with a hole in the mattress leading straight to the Pit. It was an interesting idea to try and do Hell entirely through locations – no tricks, no filters, no snazzy effects; unfortunately, the gorgeous southern desert landscapes chosen come out looking a bit too much like a credible contender for heaven, and when our hero tells his doggy they're not in Kansas anymore there's a sinful temptation to call humorously at the screen "no, you're in Arizona, ha ha ha." Quantitatively, the jokes weigh up quite well, though most of them are on the "Good Intentions Paving Co." kind of level; but Ate de Jong's last film, *Drop Dead Fred*, was overall both funnier and, curiously, darker. It passes the time, but for either transcendental bliss or everlasting torment you need really to look elsewhere.

There's quite a lot of both commodities in Bertrand Blier's *Merci la vie*, itself a kind of metaphorical road-to-hell movie, where two of the adolescent girls those middle-aged French seem to get so sweaty about find themselves walking backwards from AIDS to Auschwitz in a sort of sex-comedy version of Time's Arrow. Like Blier's meandering oeuvre as a whole, it's a tiringly unpredictable mixture of utter sublimity and horrifying aimlessness – his back catalogue includes two great and genuinely dangerous movies (*Les Valseuses* and *Beau-père*), some absolutely terrible twonk (particularly *My Best Friend's Girl* and *Notre histoire*), and a whole gaggle, like this one, that just waddle shamefully between.

Unfortunately, you can't afford to miss one just in case it's one of those "triumphant returns to form" that seem so currently popular (e.g., apparently, any Martin Scorsese film whatever). And there's much to reward the effort here. The first, and best, twenty minutes of *Merci la vie* set up a characteristic odd couple of Charlotte Gainsbourg (amazingly good) and Anouk Grinberg as, respectively, a bored bourgeoisie runaway and an out-of-control little-girl-lost disseminating a nameless and frightful STD among her army of male abusers. But Blier's rather regrettably not the sort to be content with a simple sex-swapped refry of *Valseuses*, and soon the plotline's own immune defences start to succumb to opportunistic infections of their own – starting with strange continuity misfires and random switches between colour and b&w, and gradually falling into timeslips between the twin apocalypses of HIV and the Holocaust, and reality slippages in and out of a film within the film. By the time the whole thing has deconstructed itself to a thousand tiny smithereens and stuffed them one by one back up its own ringpiece, the gloomy realization dawns that just like in *Notre histoire* the whole thing is going to turn out to be one character's confabulation, and all this shaking and shaking is going to climax in the well-stone-me revelation that it really was a kitten after all. And so it goes.

But the cast are wonderful, with Depardieu still funnier before Blier's camera than anywhere else he pops up, and the director's magnificent narrative jump-cuts as bold and bizarre as ever. It's glum to reflect that, not much more than a decade ago, in any ordinary year there'd have been at least half a dozen French films better than this; in 1992, there'll probably be none. But if you're going to do a buddy comedy about hell, this one at least has the bottle to deal, however perversely, with themes of genuine nightmare. For all their dauntless charm in facing down the big ones, we're unlikely to see *Bill*

and Ted's Egregious Retrovirus or Bill and Ted Moke o Most Non-Resplendent Pilgrimage to Treblinko in Unmarked Cattle Trucks. There's a limit, after all, on how excellent to each other we're prepared to be.

**Editor:** Wendy Brodley is taking a well-earned holiday from her TV reviews this month. She should be back next issue.

## I Like It, But It Ain't 'Alf Got Problems

### David Pringle

The third edition of *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* (St James Press, £75) has now appeared, and I for one am grateful. The book is sure to be a mine of useful information, containing as it does some xxiv+1,016 dense pages of biographical and bibliographical facts together with short critical essays on more than 600 of authors.

Previous editions of this grand opus appeared in 1981 and 1986, both edited by Curtis C. Smith with in-house assistance from the staff of St James Press. The named editors this time around are Noelle Watson and Paul E. Schellinger, assisted by Elizabeth Nishiuara and Karen P. Singson. I've never heard of these people (presumably they are a young team resident at St James Press's American headquarters in Chicago), but one's confidence is raised by the impressively long list of "Advisers," who range from Brian Aldiss and John Brunner to Darko Suvin and Marshall B. Tymn.

The contributors (those who have written the critical essays) are also numerous and well qualified, with a surprising number of British (and fanish) as opposed to American (and academic) names: among them are K.V. Bailey, David V. Barrett, Paul Brazier, Michael Cobley, Richard Cowper, the late Walter Gillings, Colin Greenland, Phil Harbottle, Edward James, Paul Kincaid, Duncan Lunan, Kev McVeigh, Lee Montgomery, Maureen Speller, Brian Stableford, Lisa Tuttle, Ian Watson and David Wingrove (although some of these, including Stableford, have contributed nothing new since the first edition). Hello, friends. There's also a goodly contingent of Australians: Russell Blackford, Van Ikin, David Lake, Yvonne Rousseau, Lucy Sussex, Norman Talbot, Michael J. Tolley, George Turner and possibly others. The editors are to be commended on trawling the English-speaking world for all the leading expertise.

And, on the whole, they have done

a good job of selecting new authors for discussion and bibliographical listing. Those who have been added since the last edition include A.A. Attanasio, Iain Banks, James P. Blaylock, Eric Brown, Lois McMaster Bujold, Storm Constantine, Charles de Lint, Karen Joy Fowler, Lisa Goldstein, Colin Greenland, John Gribbin, Elizabeth Hand, Gwyneth Jones, James Patrick Kelly, John Kessel, Michael P. Kube-McDowell, Brad Linaweaver, R.A. MacAvoy, Paul J. McAuley, Jack McDevitt, Ian McDonald, James Morrow, Pat Murphy, Rebecca Ore, Paul Park, Rachel Pollack, Robert Reed, Geoff Ryman, Joan Slonczewski, Michael Swanwick, Harry Turtledove, Andrew Weiner, Robert Charles Wilson, David Wingrove, David Zindell and Pamela Zoline. All welcome additions. (It's a great pity, though, that Terry Bisson, Michael Blumlein, Pat Cadigan, Neil Ferguson, Richard Grant, Nancy Kress, Kim Newman, Lewis Shiner, Dan Simmons, Sheri S. Tepper and Walter Jon Williams – and others, and others! – couldn't have been among them.)

However, in order to make way for these plus other new additions who in my opinion shouldn't really be there (see below), the editors have chosen to drop a number of older entries. Writers who appeared in the second edition but do not reappear in this one include Grant Allen, Chester Anderson, Brian N. Ball, Jerome Bixby, Miles J. Breuer, Jean Mark Gawron, J.B.S. Haldane, John Hersey, Langdon Jones, David Karp, Thomas McClary, Roy Meyers, Rick Raphael, R.C. Sherriff, Henry Slesar, L. Neil Smith, Earl Vincent, Donald Wandrei and Leonard Wibberley. There are some historically important names there, and it's a pity to lose them. There are also some anomalies. On what grounds was L. Neil Smith dropped? He seems to be very active and prolific still. Also, why should minor British writer Langdon Jones be dropped but equally minor American writer James Sallis be retained? (Both were active around the same time, in the late 1960s, mainly in *New Worlds*.)

Significantly lacking from the lists of advisers and contributors to this volume are the names of John Clute and Peter Nicholls, both of whom have been extremely busy over the past couple of years compiling their own *Encyclopedia of Science Fiction*, second edition (forthcoming from Macdonald/Orbit in the autumn of 1992). It's worth raising John Clute's name in particular, because he wrote two lengthy and rather devastating reviews of the earlier editions of *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers*. These appeared in *Foundation*, issues 25 and 39, June 1982 and Spring 1987. In both those pieces, Clute pointed out

that the Curtis C. Smith-edited volumes of the St James Press work had certain deep flaws.

Now I don't propose to trawl through John Clute's reviews and this new volume to see how many of the specific points have been addressed and corrected (although I can't resist remarking that *With the Night Mail* [Doubleday, 1909], Rudyard Kipling's one genuine, if very slim, science-fiction book, is still not listed, despite Clute's having drawn attention to the fact in both his reviews.) But it seems to me that Clute's main argument – namely, that there is methodological confusion in the way that the bibliographies have been arranged – has simply been ignored in the preparation of this third edition. One can understand why: the volume is part of a long-established series, and a change in methodology would have entailed a big rethink on the part of the publishers, with possible knock-on effects on their many other volumes. (Others from the same publishing house include *Twentieth-Century Children's Writers*, *Twentieth-Century Crime and Mystery Writers*, *Twentieth-Century Romance and Historical Writers* and *Twentieth-Century Western Writers* – all of them valuable books with much to praise).

Each bibliography is arranged as follows. It begins with "Science-Fiction Publications," sub-divided into "Novels" and "Short Stories." We then have "Other Publications," likewise sub-divided into "Novels," "Short Stories" and "Other" (this last being the heading for non-fiction, anthologies, etc.). Where appropriate, there are also headings for "Plays" and "Verse" and so on. The major division – between SF Publications and Other Publications – is, alas, a source of continual confusion and error.

Thus, in the first entry I turned to, I found what seem to me to be mis-attributions between the two categories. This was the entry for J.G. Ballard. Most of his novels are listed under SF Publications – Novels, while *Empire of the Sun* is listed under Other Publications – Novels. Which is fair enough. But when we turn to his collections, we find that all of them except one are listed as SF Publications – Short Stories; and the exception, *Wor Fever*, is listed under Other Publications – Short Stories. Which is a nonsense! The volume in question is every bit as science-fictional as any of Ballard's earlier collections (four of its stories first appeared right here in *Interzone*) and should be included in the main sf listing alongside *The Terminal Beach*, *Vermilion Sands*, etc. To compound the sin, the St James Press compilers have mis-cited the book's details rather badly. They say "Wor Stories. London: Gollancz," when it should of course read "Wor Fever. London: HarperCollins." Moreover, returning to the novels, we could

quibble that *The Day of Creation* should not be listed under SF – Novels; and neither, for that matter, should *The Unlimited Dream Company*, which is, most of us would contend, a fantasy...

It's on the question of Fantasy, above all, that this volume's methodology founders. Are the lists of SF Publications meant to include pure fantasy or not? This is never made clear. As we all know, a great many science-fiction writers have also produced fantasy, and, as we all know equally well, the two genres are sometimes hard to distinguish. These simple facts have left the compilers of the St James Press bibliographies floundering time and again. Look at the entry on Clifford D. Simak: all his novels, bar one, are listed under SF Publications; the exception is *The Fellowship of the Talisman* (1978), presumably excluded because it's as much of a fantasy as its generic title signals. Yet, if you're going to exclude Simak's fantasy from the sf listing, why then include *Out of Their Minds*, *Enchanted Pilgrimage* and *Where the Evil Dwells*? They're all fantasies, just as much as the *Talisman* book. (And while I'm at it, I've found another egregious error: *Off-Planet* [1988] is listed as a novel; it is of course a short-story collection.)

Small errors apart – and, goodness knows, they may be forgiven in a book of this size – it is, as I say, the whole Problem of Fantasy which diminishes the volume's bibliographical exactness. Let's consider J.R.R. Tolkien, an author who wrote not one word of science fiction in his life. In the second edition of *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers* (which, incidentally, was 100 pages shorter) Tolkien was relegated to an appendix, "Major Fantasy Writers," where his details were given alongside those of Lord Dunsany, E.R. Eddison, William Morris and Mervyn Peake. A sensible enough arrangement. But in this edition the appendix has been done away with: Tolkien and the other four are now all to be found in the main body of the book. And just look at the Tolkien entry! *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are all listed as Science-Fiction Publications – Novels, which they are not. Farmer Giles of Ham and *The Father Christmas Letters* are listed as Other Publications – Novels, which they are not (neither "other," if you take that to exclude fantasy, nor "novels"). Most of the posthumous "History of Middle-Earth" volumes, such as *The Book of Lost Tales* and *The Return of the Shadow*, are listed under Other Publications – Other, implying that they are not even fiction... Which all goes to prove that there's no way in which the St James Press editors can possibly fit Tolkien into this procrustean bed of a bibliographical schema. He shouldn't

even be in the book at all: he wasn't a science-fiction writer.

One could go on and on forever, puzzling over the place of fantasy in this volume supposedly devoted to science fiction. Flipping the pages, I find an entry for Patricia A. McKillip. I'm glad to have it – she's a writer whose bio-bibliographical details are not in any of the other books on my shelf. But does she really belong here? Well, yes, because she has indeed written one science-fiction novel, *Fool's Run* (1987). But why, oh why is that book listed here alongside *The Sorceress* and the *Cygnets* (pure fantasy, surely) under SF Publications, while almost all her other books, including the World Fantasy Award-winning *The Forgotten Beasts of Eld*, are listed separately under "Novels for children"? I scratch my head.

And now I realize that McKillip is not the only "fantasy" writer to be included for the first time in this new edition of a book entitled *Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers*. There are also entries here for the likes of David Eddings, Raymond E. Feist, Craig Shaw Gardner, David Gemmell, Barry Hughart, Guy Gavriel Kay, Katherine Kurtz and even George MacDonald (1824-1905: neither a "20th-century" writer, properly speaking, nor a science-fiction one) – all of them added since the last edition. Have any of these people written any science fiction at all? I doubt it. So what is going on? Did the editors make a policy decision to include pure fantasy authors after all? If so, it's a decision which can scarcely have been applied with any rigour, for, believe it or not, Stephen R. Donaldson has no entry here. (As well as being one of the most prominent fantasy writers of the last couple of decades he has also written sf, so he certainly merits an entry by whatever standards were applied.) Nor, if it matters, are such bestselling fantasy writers as Peter S. Beagle, Terry Brooks, Robert E. Howard, Melanie Rawn, Tad Williams and Margaret Weis & Tracy Hickman represented. There's some deep, deep confusion here.

Finally, let's brace ourselves to look at the Michael Moorcock entry... Sure enough, no visible attempt has been made to rationalize it since the second edition. Under SF Publications – Novels we have all the science-fiction books, plus miscellaneous thrillers like *The Russian Intelligence*, historical novels like *Byzantium Endures*, and a few pure fantasies like *Gloriana* and *The War Hound* and the World's Pain. Under Other Publications – Novels we have most of the remaining fantasy books mixed in with odds and sods ranging from the Sexton Blake novella *Caribbean Crisis* to *Mother London*. Where's the rhyme or reason?

If *The Lord of the Rings* can be listed as a "Science-Fiction Publication" on page 798, why can't *Stormbringer* on page 568?

Enough. Points scored. Despite all I've said, this is a fascinating book and I'm pleased to have it. I'll certainly be using it frequently – but with caution. I'd like to conclude with the following two recommendations to St James Press before they start to prepare a fourth edition for five years hence:

(1) Ponder what you're going to do about fantasy, make a sensible decision and then apply it rigorously. Personally, I would recommend a whole new volume, perhaps to be entitled *Twentieth-Century Fantasy and Horror Writers*. Tolkien, Peake, Eddings, Feist *et al*, could be shifted over to that book, leaving plenty of space for valid new additions to the sf volume. You'd also be able to include in the new tome a great many writers who currently do not appear in any of your "Twentieth-Century" series.

(2) Don't rely entirely on your in-house staff, however bright and energetic, to prepare the bibliographical entries. Or rather, get them to do the donkey work and then give the results to a couple of recognized science-fiction bibliographers to check through. I'd recommend someone like Phil Stephensen-Payne and/or his American collaborator Gordon Benson, Jr. They would pick up on the inconsistencies and idiocies, and spare you considerable embarrassment.

Think about it, please.

(David Pringle)

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# The Jade Pool

## Julian Flood

Even though I was old my eyes were still good enough when the soldiers eventually came. I could make out vultures high in the blue of the sky, see the mighty grey summits of the Roof of the World far from my summer palace, pick out strangers as they approached my city. It was when I looked closely at things that my vision failed—my eyes ached after a few minutes with the brush and I felt that I was no longer worth anything as an artist. Once I could let the calligraphy flow with the ink, but no more. I was sure that I would never again reach the peak I attained with Plum Blossom Against Spring Snows, my best work in all my long life.

I was watching the far horizon when I first saw them. The strangers, the aliens, were coming across the desert, toiling over the rock and dust pavement which shimmered with heat even in the early morning sun. The shadows of my city were thrown far out towards them, like the fingers of a great hand.

They would be some hours yet. We had waited many generations for this moment, if indeed these men were the ones the astrologers had foreseen. If they were not then there was no cause for concern I told myself, if they were then a little wait longer was no great thing.

I settled on my bench and let my eyes rest on my painting, the work of my younger self. I claim no great credit for the execution of the blossom; greater masters than I have caught that glowing red against the rich brown of the bark, although I flatter myself that their skill at depicting the hint of frost on the petals could be no greater than mine. But the choice of silk, there was true inspiration. Not white for snow, but blue, the cold clear blue of snow shadows in the high mountain passes where spring comes late and the light is strong. The poetry... well, I am no poet, a trifle, though I knew that its small virtues would have been obvious to fellow artists in the court of the Emperor. When you have no equals in power how can you trust the judgment of those around you? They seek advancement of their own position, not improvement of your artistry.

The calligraphy now, that was a different matter. I knew that it was perfect. The brush, the poem and I had been one, it had been a matter of moments to paint those quick black strokes and each had settled on the cloth as if it had been there for eternity. The beauty of the whole composition drew me out of myself, into the blue and red and black.

*In the high mountain passes a laggard spring  
has yielded to frost  
For now the blossom is perfect  
But spring shall come again*

It was much later that I looked away with a sigh, dragged from my contemplation by the soft padding steps of an approaching eunuch. He bowed until his head touched the stone floor.

"You may speak" I told him.

"The peasants to the west say that there are soldiers coming, soldiers of a kind never seen before. They will be at the gate within an hour. The Captain of the Guard begs for instruction."

"Close the gate. Arm all who are fit to bear arms. Do not let anyone enter until I have come down."

Greatly daring, he spoke again. "Are these the ones?"

For a second I thought of calling the guards, having him killed for his presumption, but I was mellowed by my immersion in a great work of art.

"We shall see, but yes, I think they are the ones. Hurry now, tell the Captain."

He walked backwards towards the door, bowing every third step. When he was out of sight I heard him running like a madman down the hill. The last remnants of the summer heat were still with us so I had to struggle with my conscience for a moment before I called for my formal robes. The stiff brocade would be stifling, the cloth heavy on my thin shoulders. It was a formal occasion I told myself, this meeting between east and west was the purpose of all our lives and must not be approached lightly. I waited for their spokesman behind the postern door, cooling my face with a jade fan, the thin stone slippery under my sweating fingers. Would he never come? The Captain crawled towards me.

"A man is outside, Excellency, he carries his shield on his spear in token of parley."

"Bring him to me."

I knew as soon as he entered that he was the one. His short tunic was of sea-wool, his legs and arms were guarded by scrolled bronze. His skin was brown, criss-crossed by white scars, the marks of many battles. He was broad and strong. I slipped my fan into the sleeve of my robe, trying to hide my vulnerability, my weakness. His helmet, curled around his head, made him look like some monstrous creature from the sea. The tufted crest was red, faded from years



in the sun. I could not see his eyes as he looked at me.

"You may approach me and speak" I told him.

"You speak Greek?"

"Well enough to greet an embassy. Do you bring a message from your King?"

"I have no king. I am A-Li-Hsiang, he who was king over kings. I have come to demand your surrender. Open your gate to my army and your people will be spared much suffering, otherwise they will die and you will open the gates anyway."

I yawned and smiled. "My spies have counted your army. There are one hundred men exactly. I can arm a thousand times your number and still till the fields. Why should my great city be afraid of one hundred men?"

"Because I am A-Li-Hsiang. You may have heard of me although I have come thousands of miles."

I allowed my smile to broaden further. "We in the Central Land have no need for news of petty barbarian princelings from the ends of the earth. No, we have not heard of you."

He took off his helmet then and looked at me and I felt the smile freeze on my lips. Without doubt he was the one of whom the seers had written. His hair was red-gold, his eyes were blue and quite mad. My voice faltered. "What do you want of us?"

"To rule the City of Lei King, to bathe in the Jade Pool of the Spring Rain, to live forever." It was his turn to smile now, hearing the hiss of my breath as he said these words.

"It is a lie, a peasant tale. These things get exaggerated in the telling..." My voice died away.

"Yield your city to me, old man. I will have it."

"Never!" I stood up and shook my puny fist in his face. "Never!" My guards stirred uneasily, fingering their swords, but when his eyes stared at them they looked away. They too knew the prophecy. He gazed at me.

"We will meet again, then I will sit on the throne and you will plead. I will remember how I have been treated."

"I... forget myself, we are not used to strangers. Let us sit together, refresh ourselves. Here I have drinks, the first ripe t'ieh-tzu. Let us talk like friends, not as those who would rather fight."

"For that politeness I will spare you when I am king. Prepare a hundred of your fruits and soon you will wait upon my whole army." It was a shock to see his back as he strode away; I had not seen a back since I had become the Hsuan Shuai of Lei Kung. He slammed the door behind him.

**T**hey came at dawn, straight for the gate, stormed it by swarming up the rough stone like monkeys. The embassy had not wasted his time as we talked, he must have picked out the routes, the weaknesses in the disposition of my men. They cut through us like a thunderbolt and took the gate in minutes. My soldiers began to run, first in ones and twos, then in battalions. Within an hour there was not one man in all my armies who still held a sword. There was rioting in the poorer parts of the town and soon fires were raging unchecked. It had taken so little to defeat us that I felt ashamed.

When he came to my summer palace A-Li-Hsiang was as untroubled as he had been the day before, the

pale glaring eyes amused when he saw the fruits piled before my empty throne. I kowtowed as he entered the room at the head of his men, all chattering in their barbaric tongue. When they saw the luxury they were silent, awed by the silk and gold. Not him. He bit into his fruit, smacked his lips over the quince flavour, sat on the throne. I advanced in obedience to his crooked finger.

"Wine, that's what we need now, do you have wine?"

"Of course." I clapped my hands like a major-domo and soon silent eunuchs were pouring cups for the sour-smelling crowd, bowing and scraping as they were kicked and pushed, shouted at for food, more wine, more wine, always more wine. Their leader grinned at me.

"Once when I took a city the ruler gave us as much wine as we could drink and more. Then when we were rolling on the floor his men rushed in thinking we were helpless. But I was sober enough." He held out his hand and showed me the scar like a flash of lightning running the length of his arm. "I got that before the others woke up. We fight better drunk. That ruler was cut into pieces and fed to his own dogs. You had nothing like that in mind, had you?"

"No," I said weakly. "I have no men who would fight you."

"Good." He resumed his brooding.

**I**n the morning I was stiff when I woke up sprawled on my bench by the window. Had it been a dream? My mouth tasted foul and my head was ringing from the wine they had forced down my throat. No dream, a nightmare. They had used my painting to show me how good they were with their spears, the heavy bronze heads slicing through the silk. Then they had thrown wine-cups until the paint and ink and wine ran together and dripped down the panelled wall. No, it was no dream even though I was alone in my summer palace. They had gone into the city, seeking plunder, escorted by my guards who only yesterday had trembled at my every word. I could see the little marching groups among the sullen masses of the city as I looked down from my garden.

"Regretting that you did not fight harder?"

I turned towards him. He was dressed in a silk robe, jade-green.

"We fought as well as we could. We were defeated before we began, because of the prophecy. 'An army will come from the West and take the City. The Elephant will rule all Seres if he comes to Ch'ang-an.'"

"But first he will enjoy his conquest of your city. He will milk it of its treasure, all its treasure. Do you understand me?" His eyes looked dangerous.

"Yes, I understand. Anything you ask I will tell you, I am defeated and weary. What do you want to know?"

He laughed, his stern face suddenly looking young, attractive in spite of its thinness and the long nose.

"Everything, I want the answer to everything, that is why I threw away an Empire, because I need always to be questioning, to be travelling towards new horizons. I had conquered all the western world, it was mine and... it was nothing in my hand. What is there to do when you rule everything? I found out, you think of a new land to conquer, make the task more

difficult, meet greater challenges with smaller strength. As I had taken the west so I would take the east, but with an army so small that the world would have to see that it was me, my power, my strength and brain...No matter, I set out for Seres with one hundred men. When I drew closer I heard a rumour of a man who had quietly lived three hundred years in an obscure city south of the Silk Road. So I turned aside from my march on your Emperor and came here, to ask questions, to satisfy my curiosity. Most of all, in all the world of questions that hum in my brain, I want to know about you." His finger stabbed and I jumped. "How did you become immortal, how did you find out about the legend of this city?"

My words came out in an uncontrollable babble. "I was a scholar in Seres Metropolis, starving, living on charity. I have quite forgotten how it felt to be poor, to lack the power of life and death over thousands who bow when they see me pass by. All because of a secret hidden in the Imperial library. It was an old scroll in the archives, taken many years before from the kingdom of Hu. It said that any man who bathes..." My voice died away. "I find it difficult to say, I have kept the secret for three hundred years."

"Who bathes in the blood of a virgin in the Jade Pool will become immortal. Yes, the monk of the City of Caves told me, when I held my sword to his throat, told me about this city, told me about you."

"And so you turned aside from the road to Ch'ang-an. Did you not think that it was a fairy-tale?"

"Truth grows at the point of a sword." He looked out at the sunlight. "We had come across the high passes, the one the guides called 'The Pass of Lesser Headaches' and the one where the headaches are greater. We moved in single file, holding on to each other to save ourselves from being swept away by the bitter winds, hacking footsteps out of the clear ice with our swords. One hundred of my men left on that road, one hundred stormed your gates. We Macedonians are a hardy race, fit to rule you little ones."

"A great tale, a great achievement. Normally that journey kills many."

His eyes were wild. "Not for me, not difficult for me. I am the conqueror of the world. I will bathe in your pool and then I will go on to Ch'ang-an. From there I will rule forever and the cities of the whole world will send me tribute." He was breathing hard, fists clenched. I said nothing and slowly the fit passed. His head drooped and he limped over to the door. I remembered the scars on his body. One at least reminded him every day that he was mortal. His voice was dull.

"Take me to the Pool. Let me look at it, then we will talk about the virgin who must be sacrificed."

The steps led down through my gardens on the west side of the hill. The fountains had failed, the toiling lines of coolies with their water jars long gone to the excitement of the riots in the city. My carp swirled distractedly in their new and smaller worlds. A-Li-Hsiang turned and looked back up the hill.

"What is that on the right hand roof, it looks like a sword threatening the sky? Do you dare such blasphemies?"

"My title is Hsuan Shuai, Commander of the Lightning in your tongue. There is the secret of my command. The sword calls lightning from the autumn

storms and sucks it into a hidden rod of gold. Eager for more yellow metal, the bolt runs into an underground cavern where it is quenched by a pool of cinabar metal. Thus my simple palace is saved."

"My palace."

"Your palace. And my title is yours, you are the Commander of Lightnings. Now I am once more only Hsu-tzu."

**T**he Jade Pool is a cistern lined with tiles of the precious stone. Above it on the hillside a smooth bowl of jade, green and cool, waits eternally to gather the spring rain. A-Li-Hsiang stood at the rim.

"Where is the bath?"

I pointed down to the arch at the base of the bowl.

"There. That stair is the only way into the bath.

Perhaps your leg is paining you and you do not wish to walk down. I can describe it..."

He ignored me and we went down into the green gloom. In the darkness the jade looked almost black. Without wishing to, I lowered my voice to a whisper.

"Fresh from the spring clouds, the rain touches nothing earthly but jade. It is gathered by my slaves in jade bottles and is taken by horseback to the Son of Heaven. Each morning while supplies last he drinks, feeling the virtue of the stone that prevents corruption coursing through his blood, leached from the tiles by water that has touched nothing else. His father of blessed memory bathed here for a day and a night during a great spring storm and after that he fathered a son, the boy who now sits on the Dragon Throne. There is naturally a great respect for the Pool in the Imperial family."

"Is it true, does it really work?"

"No. But it keeps him happy. Only men who bathe here in blood can really gain from this pool and that is a secret too great for Emperors."

It took him a long time to walk up the narrow stair. Each year I sacrificed a slave at the rim of the bowl to check the flow of blood and every year it ran without impediment straight down those narrowing, downward-sloping steps, spreading from wall to wall. I looked carefully at the workmanship, checking that each tile fitted without visible seam against the next. It was all most satisfactory. At the top he looked around, his face white.

"What was it like when you felt yourself become immortal? Was there pain?"

"No pain. It was like a light within, burning but painless, starting at my feet when the blood lapped against them. I lay down and rolled and the taste of iron was on my tongue. I covered all my body in blood and I was full of the light, so bright I kept my eyes closed. Now as the years pass my eyes become dim and I can no longer see things that are near. You must keep your eyes open when you bathe in the Jade Pool. And when you are immortal this gift which has become wearisome will be taken from me, the Pool only holds one man safe against the passing of the years. I think I will almost be glad, I was afraid of becoming blind for eternity."

"In India I saw a man who wore pebbles of crystal in front of his eyes. He was a jeweller and without the jewels he could see nothing. Wearing them he made my coronation crown, filigree gold and pearl."

"Thank you for that gift of knowledge. Perhaps, for now I am a man without position, you would ask one of your servants to make something like that for me."

I did not see him again for a day. He found me in the garden by the ponds. Before I could stand he slipped a harness of wire onto my nose and suddenly my hand, which I had raised to ward off what I thought was an attack, leapt into focus through the crystals set in the gold. I cried out in amazement and he laughed.

"You look like one of your own fish! Here fish, here's food." He threw me one of the rice cakes I had been feeding to the carp and would not be satisfied until I had sought it out with my mouth among the plants. The gift of sight made me love him, the gift of food brought hatred. What a strange man he was.

When his game was over he led me back to the throne. Seated on it, he turned me a stern face.

"Now, I will have the rest of the tale."

"The rest?"

"Yes, do you think I am a fool? You have told me half, spinning out your story in the hope that aid will come from the Emperor. How is this virgin of the city chosen? There must be some ceremony of choice. Or does it not matter, will any maiden do? Is she the ugliest, fairest, what?"

I sighed. "Am I then so transparent? She is the one who the divination shows. It is a long process, three months when I did it. First the priests..."

"Three months!" He was up, sword in hand, the veins on his neck standing out like streams on a mountainside. For a moment I thought he would drop dead with a stroke and all my troubles with him. "Three months? I didn't fake my death, sneak out of my own Empire like a beggar to wait three months in this dust hole." Suddenly he relaxed and sat down, brow furrowed in thought. "There must be a way of doing it quicker. They said that cursed knot couldn't be solved but I showed them how an Emperor gets things done, I showed them thus!" His sword whistled as it sliced into the footstool and chopped it in two. A look of cunning was on his face.

"This maiden, she is in the city?"

"Yes. It is not always the same woman, but it is always one of them."

"Then my solution is this. I will bathe in the blood of all the maidens of the City of Lei Kung."

There were thousands, young, old, rich and poor. The lines of weeping women stretched down the hillside and into the tenements, winding through the streets. Their tears flowed in silence. A-Li-Hsiang's men stood awestruck beside the queue, trying not to look at the babes in arms, the wrinkled crones, eyeing the prettier girls. Their journey had been long and they had only been two days in the city. They at least were merely men. A-Li-Hsiang was naked when he emerged, his scars showing stark in the noon sun. He waved his hand at his chief lieutenant.

"Tell the men to help themselves. As far as I'm concerned they can try to disqualify every woman here." There was a loud guffaw when his troops heard this and soon there was a chorus of screams as they put his command into action. Then, when the young

women realized that there are few fates really worse than death, the screams subsided to be replaced by pleading, smiles, invitation.

Grunting with pain, A-Li-Hsiang lowered himself into the bowl. I could see the spear wound just above his buttock which caused his limp.

"When I first came here I suffered with ulcers of the leg," I told him, "now I am cured. Your back will be healed after you have been through the light." I thought he needed some encouragement. It was well judged.

"You are a man of honour. Promise me you will bathe me in the blood of every maiden in your city."

"You have my word, the word of Hsu-tzu." He limped down into the darkness.

I had forty eunuchs with swords stationed around the rim. As each maiden laid her neck on the scalloped edge of the bowl a slave hacked through it, leaving enough skin connected to retain the head. The spouting blood splashed across the green, ran first in a trickle towards the arch, then in a stream, then a flood. Behind me the desperate giggles of the girls continued. Even when his men had been killed they would leave a race of red-haired, blue-eyed descendants to amaze the world for a few generations.

His voice boomed from the arch.

"Enough for a moment, the froth...I cannot float, it is in my lungs. Wait."

I ignored him. The bodies hung draining for a few minutes, then they were pulled away a scant second before the next victim laid her head across the stone. Cartwheels creaked as coolies loaded the carcasses and bumped away. The eunuchs slashed and hewed at neck after neck. The torrent flowed on.

"Enough, I say. Stop."

Hack. Hack. Hack.

He shouted in a language I did not know, some call to arms from his youth. There was no response, his voice was drowned in the noise of the women.

"In the name of the Gods, stop. For pity's sake."

Pause.

"But I am a man of my word. Surely you would not want me to break my bond."

"I release you from your promise. Please, please stop."

"But then you would mock me, make me pluck crumbs like a fish. No, I must continue." I gestured to the eunuchs.

Hack. Hack. Hack.

Where he found the strength I do not know. I had once smeared a slave with blood and set him in the Pool, promising him his freedom if he managed to get through the arch, death if he failed. He was a strong man, determined, but he achieved nothing; the stone was too slippery even with just a little blood. A-Li-Hsiang was a god. His red-streaked face showed briefly as he reached the arch. He must have jammed himself across the passageway, forcing he feet against the opposite wall, pressing harder as the corridor steepened and grew wider. But there was no purchase for his fingers and with a despairing cry he vanished into the dark. He said nothing more. From the red-rimmed hole there was a thick choking noise, then silence.

I felt eyes upon me. The eunuchs had paused in

their work and one girl's face leapt out of the crowd. For a moment I almost fainted, she was so like her mother. Child of my favourite concubine, she stared at me. Our eyes met. The pain when I ordered the eunuchs to continue was exquisite, but I had to be sure. For another hour the once-men sweated as they swung their blades.

I am an old man, eighty years next summer. I think of A-Li-Hsiang with something near affection. Because I brought the plan to success the Son Of Heaven has allowed me to spend my last years here, has given me titles as if I really were the man who thought out the scheme all those years ago. If I were sufficiently curious I could check back to see how many of us who looked like the original Hsuan Shuai were plucked from obscurity to serve for a few years before being replaced, ever renewed so the legend would grow and this lightning rod of a city would fulfil its purpose. "If he comes to Ch'ang-an" said the prophecy. If.

I have something to live for now, now that my sight is restored. I have chosen the silk for my new work, yellow like the dust that blows across the loess plains and languishes on our arid sands. On the silk I have painted a leaf, sear and brown after lying in the desert all winter long.

*On yellow earth the leaf waits  
eager for spring rain  
But in the city of Lei Kung  
No spring rain ever falls*

Should I sign it? Will the shade of A-Li-Hsiang curse as it reads my name and understands?

Hsu-tzu. Empty words.

**Julian Flood** makes his first appearance in *Interzone* with the above piece (his debut story appeared a couple of months ago in *Far Point* issue 2). He lives near Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, and tells us that he has "an enviable collection of rejection slips, with one finished novel (time travel used as an instrument of justice) and two part-finished novels (alternate Roman history and space opera) languishing in bottom drawers." He owns a small plant nursery, "which is an ideal occupation for a writer as there is little to do all winter."

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# Bird on a Time Branch

## Cherry Wilder

About this time Bird was minding a small house at Lily Beach for a friend and trying to meet a deadline. His work habits improved, he lost weight, he mowed the grass round his pink frame house. He found that by making what he called "a forced march" now and then, he could complete a story in a week.

No one knew where he was except the friend, Ed, who was junketing around Europe on ten dollars a day. He cut out drinking, he was not troubled by lack of sex, he was not even troubled by lack of love. He had no car and no telephone. His ex-wife, Gloria, could only write long, mean polemical letters to which he replied with saintly patience, admitting his faults.

He accepted a female kitten from Mrs O'Hara, his neighbour, and called her Missy Scarlett. She was tiger-striped, wild, and shy, flying under the house when the trash men came around. Mrs O'Hara laughed when she heard the name.

"You wouldn't believe," she said, "but I have cousins in Georgia, name of Butler."

He sat on the steps in the long summer nights, smoked a joint now and then. This is too good to be true, he thought, something absolutely unbelievable is going to happen. A dark window will open in my brain. My body is preparing to get cancer. That asshole D. will reject my book.

At the earliest possible opportunity Missy, the shy one, became pregnant. She rounded out indecently. Mrs O'Hara opined that she might have one, in fact she had two. He stayed up all night and helped her through this difficult experience. The two kittens, one black and white, one striped, were both male. When they were six weeks old Mrs O'Hara generously took the striped one to live with its grandmother and gave it the name of Tiger. The black and white kitten had patches on its face which gave it a comical bandito look; he called it Pancho Villa.

Poor Missy disappeared. He searched and called through the warm grassy lanes all the way to the beach. There was reason to believe that she had been run over by a truck, crossing Victory Drive. The black and white kitten took to sleeping in the crook of his knees.

Every afternoon Bird walked up to the post office to clear his mail box. Some days, when he was restless, he went in the morning, but mostly he held out until afternoon. This meant that he got nothing but junk mail at the pink house and he was able to control his habit of watching for the postman. He was becoming master of his fate.

One Friday afternoon he collected a royalty cheque for \$179.80 (but no letter) from his agent and a post-card of a Dali painting from Ed in Paris, France. Soft watches draped upon a bough. Ed wrote "time keeps slipping away..." He took the long way home, strolling along the road above the beach.

An engine purred like a great cat and a huge spectral automobile, pale grey with window curtains of olive-green oiled silk, drew up alongside. It was a Rolls Royce Silver Ghost. A blonde girl with bobbed hair and a green uniform sat in the driver's seat. For a few seconds, before he recognized the Egyptian logo on the doors, he wondered if he might have been transferred to the twenties.

"Mr Bird?" asked the girl. "Hector Bird?"

"Yes."

"Jump in," she said. "Mr Jones wants to see you."

He protested feebly because he felt unkept. Osiris Jones was his guru, one of the few people he loved, a source of hand-outs and crazy ideas. The old man was a cranky ex-producer who inhabited a crumbling hacienda in the Hollywood hills.

"Come as you are," said the pretty chauffeuse. "The old man is dying."

He slipped into the cool, cavernous interior of the Silver Ghost and was whirled away. During the long drive he fortified himself with two shots of Irish whisky and a packet of Cheesi Snax from the built-in bar. He tapped on the partition, and the girl's voice said:

"Use the tube."

The speaking tube at his side emitted a draft of cool air.

"You're new," he said. "What became of Dean Proudfoot, the other chauffeur?"

"He retired," said the girl. "His daughter took over the job. My name is Jenny Proudfoot."

"Who's with the old man? Did any of his children show up?"

"No," she said. "There's just Ramona. The Doctor comes around, but he can't play chess any more."

He knew then that Osiris was really on the skids. It was dark when they reached El Paradiso. In the hall Ramona, a tiny woman, her skin patterned with wrinkles like the lace of her mantilla, embraced him and wept. She had been a famous beauty, star of the old man's films.

"Agree with him!" she begged. "Just agree with anything he says, Heck. He has had so many disappointments."

Osiris was propped up in a metal hospital bed,

which occupied one corner of his vast bedroom. His knobby old man's body was covered by a sheet; his long, smooth face had become angular and hard. It was no time to scoff at the comparative disappointments of a rich man. Bird knew very well that money didn't buy happiness or bring those neurotic middle-aged kids to their father's bedside. He settled himself in a chair and talked about anything that came into the old man's head. The Spanish American War, women, thought-transference, the plots of old comedy films, the Book of the Dead. Around midnight the nurse, Frank, came in and said he must give Osiris his medication.

"Fifteen minutes," wheezed the old man. "I have to do some business with Mr Bird."

When they were alone again he said:

"I'm leaving you five thousand dollars. All that's left of a certain slush fund. Won't go through the books."

He thanked the old man.

"I want you to do something for me, Heck," said Osiris. "You must go to the Camax Conversation. The Drum Ceremony is performed once every seven years at a certain conjunction of the moon and Venus. You go as my deputy... the token is in that lacquer box on the night table."

"Right," he said. "I'll go. Who are these people, Osiris?"

He guessed the answer. Osiris believed that California was a fulcrum of the dark world, where occult sects were gathering for the last days of mankind. Osiris counted himself as part of this magical drift to the west coast: he worshipped the gods of ancient Egypt. The Camax circle, he assured Bird, had rediscovered the secrets of the Maya. They searched the world for rifts in the fabric of space-time. Ho-hum. He was not excited at the prospect of attending an occult ceremony, it was simply his duty to the old man. Besides, Osiris said that Jenny Proudfoot would make arrangements, and this cheered him up. He reached into the lacquer box and found a kind of golden dog-tag stamped with the representation of a bird's head. He slipped it around his neck.

Frank, the night nurse, came back, and Osiris pressed Bird's hand. The old man was hoarse from talking too much; his breath came in shuddering gasps. He knew that he would never see Osiris alive again.

It was too late for him to be driven home. He ate supper with Ramona - bean salad and cold chicken, washed down with red wine - and slept in one of the guest rooms. In the morning he put on a clean T-shirt with Osiris' trademark of a lotus and a winged sun disc. He fixed himself eggs and coffee in the kitchen; about ten o'clock Jenny Proudfoot drove him back to Lily Beach in a more modest car, a black Chevrolet.

He sat beside her and she explained how he would reach the Camax Conversation. He would be called for at six o'clock on the evening of the following day; he must wait outside the Lily Beach post office. Wait for her? No, for a man named Westbury, who drove a pale blue pick-up. She gave him its number, told him to be sure to wear his token and carry some identification. He felt depressed. Jenny Proudfoot had maintained a forbidding attitude throughout their



drive. Now she said bitterly:

"You'll still get your money if you don't go along."

Bird was shocked.

"Of course I'll go along!" he said. "I promised the old man!"

"Okay," she said. "I'm sorry. We've had some trouble with freeloaders."

She stopped the car at a gas station and drew out a zippered roll of navy-blue nylon that he didn't recognize at first.

"Sleeping bag," she said. "The old man wanted you to use it at the meeting. It gets cold where they are."

He took the bag, which was a much more expensive item than the ones he remembered, but he did not have time to get on a better footing with Jenny. They came into his street, and there was a bright red sports car parked outside the pink house. He guessed what this meant and did not ask her in to see Pancho or have a coke. When the Chevy was driving away in a cloud of dust Gloria came storming out of the little house and started in.

"So this is where you've been hiding, you son of a bitch!" she shouted. "Harvey! Harvey! Get the number of that car! That must be one of his women! You think I'm blind, or what? You think I don't know what you're planning? You think I don't see through this set-up?"

Harvey, Gloria's new lawyer, was a neat, toothy young man, completely under her spell. Between them they quieted Gloria down and got her into the house. Bird, sick at heart, tried to explain where he had been. Gloria let off another blast or two at Osiris and swore to take Bird for every penny of the million dollar legacy she was sure he would receive if the old faker really did kick out. Gloria knew, she just knew, that Bird was planning to go to Mexico. Bird gave her the cheque for \$179.80. He told her he wasn't planning to go anywhere, he was minding the house for Ed. Another of his broken-down cronies, another lying bum, snarled Gloria. He told her he had sent in the novel, which was true, and that D. was delighted with it. He had no idea whether this was true or not.

"This time, you make a penny I'll take it out at the source!" growled Gloria. "Hear what he says, Harvey. Hear how he goes on... Isn't he every bit as bad as I told you? I know you, Heck. I can read you like one of your own trash paperback books. You are a monster, Heck, an unfeeling, dishonest, bug-eyed monster. You want the Señoritas, don't you, Heck?"

He became more and more silent. He made tea. Finally Gloria and Harvey went away. He coaxed Pancho out from under the house and opened a can of cat food. He was sorry for Gloria, but at the same time he hated her for making ugly scenes. He realized that certain things she had said about him were true; he wondered what he had done to her to make her behave like a crazy woman. He wondered how he could give Gloria maybe \$1000 from his legacy without her taking the lot. He wondered where she had gotten this crazy idea about Mexico. Thank heavens she hadn't heard the name of his kitten! He sat on the porch in the evening smoking a last joint and watching Pancho Villa dance about chasing moths.

Next day he dressed carefully for his rendezvous with the Maya. He put on his dark red shirt and leather jacket, dug out his boots because he had some idea they might be walking into the mountains. He asked Mrs O'Hara to feed Pancho in case he was late back; he wrote a note to his agent warning him that Gloria was on the war-path.

He sauntered off to the post office in plenty of time; his mail was disappointing – all his box contained was a request to give blood in a good cause. Still, this was the way of things on the day after a cheque.

The blue pick-up arrived on the dot of six; the driver lowered his shades to scrutinize Bird and his ID. Westbury was a powerfully built man of about forty with an olive complexion, high cheek bones, black eyes and black hair, shoulder length, clubbed back with a thong. Bird could not decide if he had Indian blood or if he was simply the kind of Caucasian who got to play Indians in the movies.

They drove onto the freeway, heading due east; night came down swiftly, and the lights of the city sprang up in glittering rows. They talked in a desultory fashion, and Westbury began to drive furiously, spinning the pick-up through clover-leaves, down underpasses, leaving the freeway entirely, then scooting back on.

Bird, whose sense of direction had never been good, found that he had lost it entirely when he gave up driving a car. For a moment he felt that he had oriented himself... they passed a motel called "Cactus Flower" which he believed was not far from the town of Mojave. Then Westbury began twisting and turning again. Finally he slowed a fraction and said:

"Got a tail. Can't shake him."

"You mean we're being followed?"

"Little bitty red devil," nodded Westbury. "Some European make. Sure as hell hope it isn't..."

"It isn't!" said Bird miserably.

Afterwards he wondered who Westbury hoped that it wasn't. A reporter? The finance company? A rival coven? He went on to explain that it was his ex-wife and her lawyer. Gloria had this fixed idea that he was lighting out for Mexico. He half-expected Westbury to leave him on the side of the road. The big man laughed, however, and was sympathetic. One touch of spouse trouble made the whole world kin.

"That lawyer fellow, Howard..."

"Harvey."

"He sure can drive," said Westbury. "But man, we're not heading for Mexico. We're nowhere near the border!"

"That wouldn't matter to Gloria."

They dodged about again, and Westbury seemed satisfied with the result. They drove on and on, and the pattern of the stars led Bird to believe that they had made a circle and were somewhere southeast of Mojave. They came to something like a ghost town; Westbury said no, there were half a dozen families still living there to cater for the tourists.

They drove through a canyon and into the shadow of low hills, ochre under the moon. Bird saw grey-green scrub in the headlights and imagined the bright eyes of desert creatures. A cyclone fence weaved in and out on the right-hand side of the road, among boulders. Westbury had reduced speed.

"Feel it?" he asked. "Hear it?"

He throttled down, and Bird heard for the first time a sound like distant thunder. Drums! When he rolled down his window the night air prickled against his skin. The pick-up swerved to avoid something that was not quite mist spilling over the road. Westbury laughed at himself.

"Effect of the light, I guess," he said. "Makes me jumpy. All this area near the fence is in slippage, you could say. Never know where you are...or when."

They turned right, drove over a culvert and through an open metal gate. Bird saw points of light like tiny globules of St Elmo's fire on the gate's hinges. Westbury slid the truck up a gentle slope to a parking area, cleared of boulders. They were climbing out when the red sports car came at the gateway below them with a scream of tires. Harvey seemed to check at some invisible barrier, then miss the angle for the turn. There was a rending crash; the red car turned over, crumpled, plunged over the far side of the road, out of sight.

"Gloria!"

Bird was shouting, so was Westbury who caught him by the arm.

"...an accident!" said the big man.

"Help them!" shouted Bird. "I have to help them!"

"We got to keep going on in!" said Westbury.

"Are you crazy?" cried Bird. "They're bleeding! They're dying! The car will burn!"

Westbury, incredibly, checked the two large chronometers strapped to his wrist.

"Okay," he said. "But remember, you can't come back. The ceremony is out for you, understand. We had seven minutes in hand, now it's about five. You run hard as you can down to the gate and shut it...so they got NO ALTERNATIVE TRACK..."

He was yelling this to Bird who was already running as hard as he could go. He felt the crazy sleeping bag slap against his back but could not wait to shuck it off. He heaved at the massive gate and it swung to, lightly; he shut a long bolt. He leaned on the cool tingling gatepost, gasping for breath, and the red sports car shot past on the road. He saw Gloria and Harvey quite distinctly, heading after that will-o'-the-wisp, Hector Bird, en route to Mexico.

When he got his breath and looked back there was no sign of Westbury or the pick-up. He thought of disobeying orders and following the dark road into the hills. He was aching from the run and light-headed. He wondered if there had been some Mayan magic in the coffee he had taken from Westbury's thermos flask. He climbed over the gate, walked across the road and looked down: nothing, no smoldering wreck.

He started out walking back the way they had come, but he was feeble, his legs could hardly carry him. He felt exposed and vulnerable out there on the moonlit road and crossed back to the shadows. There was a weak place in the fence about half a mile from the gate. He climbed through and found his way to an inviting patch of white sand, dry and insect-free, screened from the road by a rock pile. He took off his boots, unrolled the sleeping bag, and crawled inside. He addressed Osiris in his mind, apologizing: Sorry, this was the best he could do. He fell deeply asleep, lulled by the music of a distant drum.





**H**e woke at first light; the eastern sky was red, it was going to be another hot day. There had been some condensation, the outer surface of his sleeping bag was a little damp. An old farm truck rattled past on the road. He saw a damp scrap of paper taped to a zipper pocket on the bag: it bore his own name and the hieroglyphic signature of Osiris Jones. Inside the pocket was a manila envelope like a bulky manuscript. It contained \$5000 in used bills, twenties and hundreds.

Bird was terrified. There was his legacy, more cash money than he had ever had his hands on in his life and he was alone, unprotected, in the god-damned desert. It was this circumstance, of course, which carried him all the way back to Lily Beach in a state of blessed ignorance. He took out three hundred dollars, then taped the envelope with the rest of the money against his skin with sticking plaster from the first-aid pocket of the sleeping bag. He walked grimly back to the ghost town, got a lift to a larger town, rode a bus to the city and took a cab to Lily Beach. He was unusually taciturn, hugging his cash. He made no conversation, saw no papers, exchanged no pleasantries.

He had the driver let him out at the corner and strolled back to the pink house. He saw that the grass had grown up thickly around the steps. Hadn't he mowed it just last week? Now the grass was tall, there were daisies and a butterfly or two; he heard the sound of the sea. A black and white cat was sitting on the overgrown path in the sunshine.

Bird reeled against the hedge; his beard had grown to his knees, his old flintlock was covered with rust. He opened the gate warily and whispered:

"Pancho? Hey, Pancho?"

The cat rose up politely as if it knew its name. Bird's breath was tight in his chest; no, it was some drop-in, visiting cat.

"Pancho? It's me, old buddy..."

The cat, still a young cat surely, came forward cautiously with its head cocked, listening. Then, quite visibly Pancho remembered. He came bounding up to Bird, who sat down on the path. He rubbed himself against Bird's chest and purred outrageously. A boy went past on a bike and nearly hit the pair of them with a rolled-up copy of the *Lily Beach (Happy) Times*, an advertising throwaway. Bird learned that he had been absent from the house ten months and two days. When he staggered up to his front door, Mrs O'Hara called cheerily over the fence:

"Hey there! How was Mexico?"

He did not break down and tell her, there and then; the moment passed. He accepted the verdict of the majority with Gloria and Harvey who had spotted him in Tijuana, just missed him in Cuernavaca, discovered his alias on the border with Guatemala. He accepted the kidding of his agent, who sang "South of the Border." He made it his business to find out everything that had happened while he was away. Osiris was dead. Robert Kennedy was dead. Nixon was President. D. had rejected his novel but B., good man, had been delighted with it. Ed was planning to stay longer in Europe. Jenny Proudfoot had moved to New York.

Certain things worked out. Gloria settled for \$1000, married Harvey and navigated for him on auto rallies. They made a great team. Bird was glad they were alive,

even if it meant that he had missed out on a secret of the universe.

He settled up with Mrs O'Hara for cat food and veterinary treatment; Pancho and Tiger had both been fixed at six months. He spent some of his legacy on a Volkswagen, got a licence all over again and went to find the place where time had slipped. It was arid and uninteresting in daylight, when the moon was not in conjunction with Venus. A mining company owned the land inside the fence. In the ghost town he shopped for souvenirs and asked questions about a commune or a sect who met in the hills. No one knew anything. He saw Westbury again – the true Westbury, not some look-alike – years later, playing an old Indian construction worker on daytime television.

**E**ventually he went to Mexico. He and Pancho took a house for the summer in Yucatan, and he began his Mexican time-branch trilogy. He met his true love and second wife, Elaine, buying a shawl in the market. He embroidered his Mexican experience the more lovingly because it stood for something else. For the intrusion of the hidden world into everyday life.

"Mexico" was for him the land of dreams. He studied the Maya and the Aztecs. He pondered the fate of Ambrose Bierce. He recalled the story of the mad Empress, poor Carlotta, who survived the Emperor Maximilian by more than sixty years. She spent her declining years in a Belgian chateau, with a park, and as she was taken rowing on the lake would often say: "Tomorrow we are going to Mexico..."

Pancho lived for seventeen years and remained the most lovable of all Bird's cats. In the course of time, Bird had a daughter, and the daughter her own pet kitten.

"Daddy," she asked, "will Pancho and Mimsy remember us if we go away for a whole year?"

Bird was studying a travel guide entitled *Europe on \$20 a Day*.

"Take it from me, honey," he said. "Cats can remember!"

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**Cherry Wilder**, a New Zealander by birth, lives with her husband in Germany. She has contributed three stories to us before – "Something Coming Through" (IZ 6), "The Descent of Sunshine" (IZ 22) and "Looking Forward to the Harvest" (an original in *Interzone: The 5th Anthology*, 1991). Her horror novel *Cruel Designs* was reviewed by Paul McAuley in IZ 32. She's currently working on a new sf novel, and hopes to have a collection of "strange tales," *The House on Cemetery Street*, published soon.

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# Interzone: A Bridge So Far

Mike Ashley

**I** want to say something about *Interzone*. I've been sitting here for some hours looking back over the last fifty issues, discovering stories I'd forgotten about, renewing acquaintance with stories I vividly remember, noticing names once new, now seasoned professionals, and a strong impression came over me.

My god, it survived!

I well remember getting the first issue, ten years ago, along with its freebie J.G. Ballard booklet for charter subscribers. I was pleased to see a new British science-fiction magazine – I always am. But I remember thinking about the extent to which it was following in *New Worlds*'s fading footsteps, at a time when that type of sf was not in vogue.

What type of sf? Well, yes, that was another problem. Call its fiction what you will: literary, experimental, avant garde...I suppose it was all of that. At the time, I thought it was pretentious. It wasn't really sf, was it, any more than *New Worlds*'s contents had become by the late sixties. I recall when in one of *New Worlds*'s final issues, Charles Platt declared that "New Worlds is not a science-fiction magazine." Nor was it, by then, and neither was *Interzone* at first. Malcolm Edwards, in an early editorial, commented upon *Interzone* being haunted by the ghost of *New Worlds*. In many ways, *Interzone* is haunted by the ghosts of all of Britain's past sf magazines, for in its own future is their legacy.

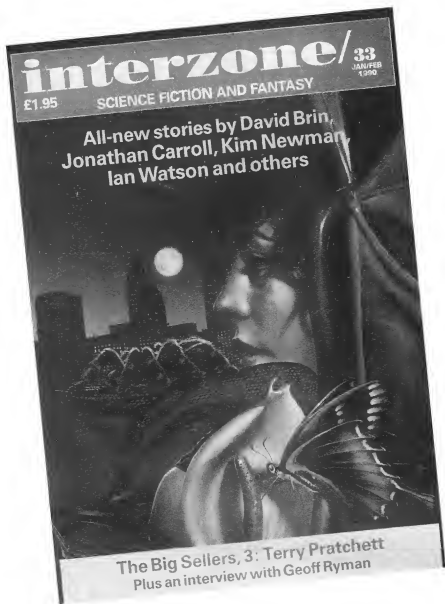
Looking back at that first issue I'm reminded of the one story that stood out, by the one author who to my mind was true to the profession of the storyteller: "Kitemaster" by Keith Roberts. Yes, perhaps I'm old-fashioned. I can enjoy a good experimental piece of fiction if I'm in the right mood, but more often I'm not. But a good story, now that will create the right mood. And I don't think I'm alone. "Kitemaster" turned out to be the most popular story in the first four issues of *Interzone*, and it went on to win the BSFA Award as the year's best story.

And that's what struck me as I worked through progressive issues of *Interzone*. The gradual development of



*Interzone* started in a time-warp. No, that's silly. A time-stasis, perhaps. Whatever it was, sf in Britain had somehow stood still, or was even rolling backwards. There wasn't anything to maintain the impetus, or even provide a direction. Books don't provide a direction. Publishers will seldom take the risk of anything too boldly new.

They might, once in a while, if it's there, but how does it get there? It has to grow, and be nurtured by those willing to take the risks: the small-press magazines. That's where all the talent for new science fiction develops – well, damned near all. Books might be the fruits of science fiction, but the magazines provide the soil to allow it to grow.



Some of those small-press magazines might be regarded as professional. *New Worlds* was during most of its life. From 1949 to 1964 it was published by Nova Publications, a company established by a group of fans who met regularly in a London pub. *Interzone* started in much the same way. *New Worlds*, though, had a clear editorial identity in the shape of John Carnell. *Interzone*'s persona was blurred at the outset by its octo-cerebral editorial collective, but that soon whittled down to two and then one, and that helped give it an identity and character.

But between the death of *New Worlds* in 1971 (let's forget the anthology years, and the final few issues thereafter) and the start of *Interzone* in 1982, there hadn't been anything around to push back the frontiers of sf. There had been Keith Seddon's *Vortex*, which saw five issues in 1977. That was very Moorcock-inspired, and

might have developed into something had not production costs far exceeded sales revenue. There was also James Manning's *Ad Astra*, which ran for sixteen issues between 1978 and 1981. This was bold and adventurous, but couldn't make its mind up whether to be a science fiction or a science fact magazine, and lost out in both markets. Neither of these moved sf in any direction. Paul Campbell's *Extro*, from Northern Ireland, might have had more potential. A full-blooded sf magazine in the more traditional Carnellian mould, it nevertheless over-stretched itself with inadequate finances and limited distribution, and collapsed after three issues.

**B**ut *Interzone* survived. And it's starting to creep into the record books. Fifty-seven issues in ten years. There have been only two other British sf magazines to survive for

more than ten years: *New Worlds* and *Science Fantasy*, and in their first decade *New Worlds* produced only forty-eight issues (it's now restarted as a paperback at 217), and *Science Fantasy* only forty-one (it died after ninety-three, twelve as *Impulse*). And only one other title reached fifty-seven issues: *Authentic*, in April 1955. (It saw eighty-five issues in all, ceasing in October 1957 after only six years and ten months.) It doesn't yet quite compare statistically on the international stage, but in Britain *Interzone* is now the third longest surviving sf magazine.

How the hell did it do it?

Perhaps the editor has the financial answer. I have my gut feeling. Let's accept the fact that the original editorial/publishing team had a lot of common sense in the way they let the magazine grow naturally, establishing a strong subscriber base, before dipping their toes in the turbulent waters of professional distribution. By the time *Interzone* crept out of the woodwork it had acquired a name and reputation that helped secure its continued development. Let's accept all that.

It's why it acquired that reputation that interests me, and it was some inking as to that which dawned on me as I went back through the past issues.

It was the return to story values, within a 1980s treatment. It bridged the gap that *New Worlds* never managed to achieve, and which the other magazines never lived long enough to even try.

You see, *Interzone* starts with the glitzy-ritzy too-clever-by-half literary experiments of Angela Carter and Michael Moorcock, but it's pretty soon stepping back from that. Within its first ten issues it was asking the question, "should we be less literary and publish more genuine science fiction?" It was introducing the concept of "radical hard sf," a term that seemed to fit into the "cyberpunk" mould.

And so *Interzone* started to attract the American brigade – William Gibson, John Shirley, Bruce Sterling – the ones who were building the "cyberpunk" glasshouse. It published one of the most powerful stories of the eighties: Geoff Ryman's "The Unconquered Country," which went on to win the World Fantasy Award. It attracted new writers – Scott Bradfield, Michael Blumlein, Kim Newman, Paul McAuley, Eric Brown – who wanted the radical freedom of sf, but in the context of true story-telling values. It encouraged the stolid middle range of British writers – Brian Stableford, Ian Watson, Richard Cowper, Bob Shaw – all of whom lacked a British story market.

And in rediscovering the values of true story-telling, *Interzone* also became "literary." More by default than design, *Interzone* made the link,

between the traditional sf story and modern radicalism, and in so doing it gave back to sf some of its respectability. Somewhere about half-way through its 50-plus issues, it became a genuine science-fiction magazine, lock, stock and barrel.

So has *Interzone* sold out to the establishment? No, of course it hasn't, and in any case it's a pointless argument. The important point is that, unlike so many one-time well-meaning radicals, *Interzone* hasn't become the establishment. To many, it probably contains far more radical fiction than ever they buy off the bookshelf. And that's because *Interzone* continues to push the frontiers of fiction. In its way, it's doing what David Lasser did at *Wonder Stories* in 1931, what John Campbell did at *Astounding* in 1938, what Horace Gold did at *Galaxy* in 1950, what Moorcock did at *New Worlds* in 1964, and what Ted White did at *Amazing* in 1970, though it's doing it rather more quietly.

It also encouraged others to try the waters again. I have been both amazed and delighted at the recent attempts by others to launch magazines. Those that have jumped straight in at the deep end, like *The Gate*, *Far Point* and *R.E.M.*, may have some trouble surviving. Those that have taken the *Interzone* route and developed their subscriber base first, like *Dream* (now *New Moon*) and *Back Brain Recluse*, may have a better chance. But I don't think they could have done it without *Interzone*.

And I'm not sure they can survive without *Interzone*.

When I wrote the entry on *Interzone* for the Greenwood Press volume *Science Fiction, Fantasy and Weird Fiction Magazines* back in 1985 I remarked that "in future years [*Interzone*] may be regarded as the one true 'science fiction' magazine of the eighties." I think I still believe that, though I'm less sure what it means in comparison with the American *Isaac Asimov's SF Magazine* and *The Magazine of Fantasy & Science Fiction*. What I am sure about is that *Interzone* is the one magazine from the eighties that has remained true to its purpose and has provided a steadfast and reliable direction to its readers and contributors.

And it's still moving forward. *Interzone* hasn't finished building the bridge. In fact the bridge probably has no end. There's a great gulf out there that we're all crossing, and none of us knows where it ends. *Interzone*, alone of all current magazines, is providing a passage across that gulf.

(Mike Ashley)

## BACK-ISSUE CLEARANCE SALE!

Copies of all back issues of *Interzone* are still available at £2.50 each (£2.80 overseas; \$5 USA) – with the exception of the out-of-print numbers 1, 5, 7, 17 and 22.

Now we've decided to have another clear-out of surplus stocks of old *Interzone* back issues. This time, we're selling off all available issues up to and including number 30 for the special price of **£1.50** each inland, including postage & packing. That's £1 off the standard back-issue price of £2.50. (Overseas rate £2; USA \$4.)

So now is your chance to catch up on *Interzone's* first 30 issues – packed full with excellent stories and interesting non-fiction material.

We even have a few shop-soiled copies of the out-of-print issue one. The covers are slightly scuffed, but they are otherwise in sound condition. These too are available at the discount price of £1.50 (£2 overseas; \$4 USA). Issues 5, 7, 17 and 22 are completely unavailable, alas.

Order any or all of these discounted back issues from *Interzone*, 217 Preston Drove, Brighton BN1 6FL, UK. Please make cheques or postal orders payable to "Interzone" – and don't delay. Some issues are in shorter supply than others, and this offer closes on **1st July 1992**.

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We have already been going for ten years, and we have moved from quarterly to bimonthly to monthly publication, so early "lifers" bought a bargain! Lifetime subscriptions to *Interzone* now cost £260 (UK); £320 (overseas); \$520 (U.S. accelerated surface mail). Please make your cheque payable to "Interzone" and send it to our main editorial address, shown on page 3.

# THREE VIEWS OF A STAKED P



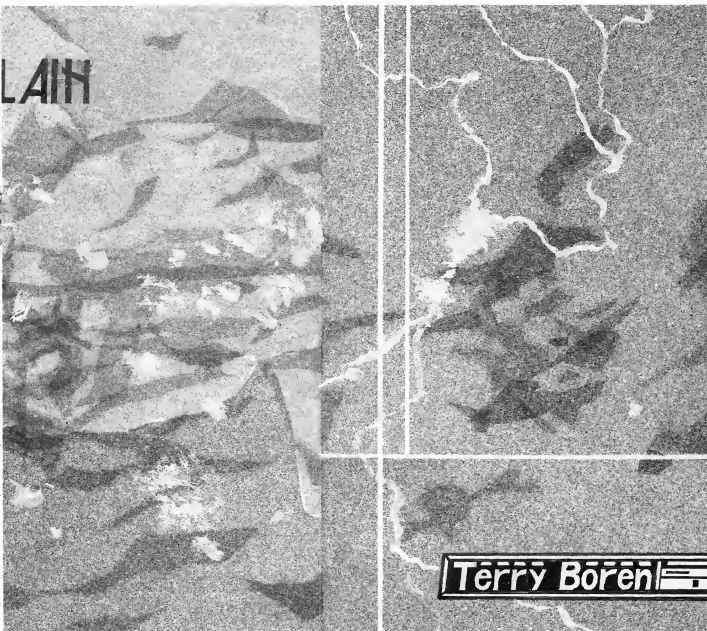
**T**he road is long and hot between Albuquerque and Hobbs. It cuts across the eastern end of the desolate Jornada Del Muerto, through Carizozo, the Jicarilla Mountains, and thousands of years of geology. Driving south, I listened to anything I could pull in on the a.m. radio: the weather, a preacher selling prayer shawls, news about murders and little girls found dead in arroyos—ionized signals from anywhere. James old boy, I kept asking myself, why are you doing this?

It was early May, but the heat was already smashing up from the asphalt. That part of southern New Mexico is a beautiful, grim and extensive region of ocotillo and prickly pear, salt flats and broken spines of rock cut by arroyos and frequented mostly by scorpions, snakes, and an occasional coyote or mountain lion. I was sweating like a pig, and I had an imaginary itch behind my eyes where the new hardware had gone in. A change in my brain structure, a change in my life, the minimum requirements for useful employment. After a late lunch at a sweltering gas station in Roswell, I forced myself back into the car

and continued on across the Llano Estacado, the Staked Plain. Farther east, the enormous agricultural complexes of High Plains Energy and Mineral pumped the aquifers to exhaustion and watered the ground. Here, the desert endured.

It was about four-thirty when I got in to Hobbs, and about ninety-seven degrees. I needed a beer worse than I needed God. Out of nostalgia, I guess, or compulsion, I pulled into the parking lot of a bar I remembered called The Rigger. Stepping into the bar was like walking out of kleig lights and into a dark closet. I took a seat at the first table I stumbled over and ordered a draft from the shadowy barmaid. When I squinted my eyes the chips cut in, but it didn't help my vision much; water was all I saw, deep below the floor.

When I had last downed a beer at The Rigger, the low-ceilinged room had been full of smoke, noise and dusty oilfield workers. My eyes began to adjust to the dim light and I realized how empty the bar was. There weren't many jobs left in the oilfields, and not many customers in The Rigger.



One old man in a battered hat and boots sat at the bar; he held a cigarette and a glass of whisky in his right hand, but he didn't drink or lift the cigarette to his mouth, just sat there watching smoke curl toward the ceiling. There was a solidity to him, like he hadn't moved from that spot in years. At the other end of the bar, a squirrely looking skinny guy with tattoos stared at me with odd, pale eyes. Ink-blue lines of spiderwebs seemed to hold all of his joints together, even his jaws. I wondered if my brain had tossed him out for my consideration. He hadn't been there when I came in; I was almost sure. In the darkened booths a few more patrons drank quietly.

I had turned my back on the room to look for Beto, the Rigger's bartender, when a big hand grabbed my shoulder from behind and swung me around on the stool. I stared into Sonny Burnham's broken-toothed grin, and I felt as if the last ten years hadn't happened.

"What you doing back here Jimmy, asshole, been lookin' for me?"

"Figured you'd be here, compadre," I said.

When I had left southeastern New Mexico to go to school in Albuquerque, Sonny had been about thirty and still working as a roughneck. He was tall, muscular, and funny, with skin burned brown, and waist-length hair worn in a long braid. His hair was sun-damaged yellow, almost white, the mark of a blond who works out in the desert sun.

He hadn't changed much in ten years. But the sun seemed to have sucked every ounce of fat off him. His hair was thinner, too, the long braid was more like a rat's tail now.

"Well, how the hell are you, college boy?" he said.

Looking at Sonny, I wasn't sure I knew. He had meant a lot to me when I was a kid, my compadre Sonny; I had thought that he was what I wanted to be — expansive, a jokester, someone nobody messed with, someone wild like Sonny.

When I was eighteen, my dad stretched me out on the asphalt for drinking more than he thought I should, and I realized, finally, that I had to hit him back or leave. I ran. I spent the next five years working

the oilfields around Artesia and Hobbs in southeastern New Mexico and west Texas, sweating in the hundred-and-ten-degree heat during the day and knocking down beers with Sonny all night. I ran back to Albuquerque and the University when I was twenty-three.

Maybe I had come south again trying to find Sonny, I don't know. High Plains Mineral and Water had hired me to work out of Hobbs, given me a job. There weren't many jobs for geologists, but that's just an excuse. Maybe I went back looking for Tularosa Luna ten years too late, or maybe for my Grandpa. But I was bound to have found Sonny.

On our way out to Sonny's trailer, we drove through Hobbs. The churches were still there, but boarded-up businesses and houses for sale were everywhere. The veneer of prosperity over the dry little town was beginning to wear thin as the petroleum extraction business died. The Texas oil companies were pulling out.

But Sonny seemed cheerful enough. When I asked him what he was doing to stay alive, he grinned and said "Killing things – coyotes mostly, a few cougar – and flyin' assholes all over the state." I must have looked surprised.

"Oh yeah!" he said. "I got my license before they fired me. Bought me a plane and an infrared chip." He tapped his forehead.

"How about you, college boy?"

"I got a degree, a Master's," I said, "in geology."

"Geology! Like for mining?"

"Petroleum geology." Also in hydrology, but I wasn't too eager to talk about that. I had a brand new semiconductor detector chipped into my optic nerve. It was vastly more complicated than Sonny's simple lens, and more invasive. The chip translated readouts from the detector and a spectrometer into a visual display on my retina. The data could be stored and accessed later with the proper equipment, and I could also uplink to the groundwater survey satellite.

All of the surface water in New Mexico was apportioned; but quietly, nobody the wiser, I could find water in basins too marginal to have been tapped. Pumping New Mexico's ground water wasn't really legal, but some of the basins ran under the border. First come, first served.

I thought Sonny was going to laugh his guts out. He almost drove the Chevy off the road.

"Petroleum geology! You got screwed again! Let's take us a little ride," he said. "I want you to see my plane." He was still chuckling to himself. About the time Sonny finished congratulating me on my choice of careers, we arrived at a small private airfield not far out of town.

As we taxied his Piper from the corrugated tin hangar, Sonny bragged about the women he had, the money he made on bounties and from flying businessmen from Texas and California out to shoot coyotes from his plane. "Still gettin' paid by the Lone Star," he said.

It didn't take much brains to figure out that he was probably also flying pharmaceuticals in from Mexico to supplement his income.

He was a lot the same – an open, high-spirited man with an outsized sense of humour. He was rough and

a bit mean, but I still found myself admiring him in an open-mouthed sort of way. After all, I thought, killing coyotes for businessmen is no worse than stealing water for them.

The Piper was a gallant little machine, and Sonny took off from the dirt runway like a madman. The plane climbed precipitously and then banked sharply away from the airport. The afternoon was bright and hot, and the plane alternately ascended in the thermals rising off of the hot ground, then abruptly dropped hundreds of feet. We wheeled and dove above the Llano Estacado until we came in sight of the upthrust of the Capitan Reef.

The Caprock marks the remains of a limestone reef deposited in the Permian sea some two hundred million years ago. Behind the reef proper, to the west of the Caprock formation, are the bedded strata, evaporites and carbonaceous gravels left behind by a shallow inland sea. Below the caprock, fossil wreckage – calcareous and saliculous sponges, chrynoïd and salicified fossil remains – form talus slopes where the reef subsided into deep water. All desert plain, now.

Within sight of the Caprock the Piper banked again and headed parallel to the rampart, but well out over the flat basin lying in the sun and impaled with yucca, creosote, and cholla.

"Most of the lions stay up behind to the Caprock," Sonny said. He fumbled behind his seat for some binoculars. "But the coyote like it out here on the flat. See ya, and they break for the rocks."

I white-knuckled it for a few heartbeats as Sonny raised the glasses to his eyes with one hand and with the other pulled his rifle from its sheath attached to the seat. He grabbed the stick again just as the plane began to roll, laughed and pointed below and to our left. "There she is!" he whooped, and the plane dropped like a stone. Sonny pulled up not more than fifteen metres from the ground, then dipped one wing and cut in front of the terrified animal.

The coyote cut left toward the rocks.

"Bitch!" Sonny yelled and laughed as he cut in front of the animal again. We couldn't have been six metres above the bayonet heads of the yucca. The coyote was thin and yellow-grey. She swerved right and then stopped, looked over her shoulder at us, then bolted left again. Sonny opened the window of the Piper. The strap of the binoculars whacked against his cheek. He shoved the rifle out of the window, tossed the binoculars into my lap and grabbed the stick. The plane banked, the rifle fired and Sonny pulled back on the stick. The coyote leaped and collapsed. She tumbled in a cloud of dust, but her roll ended with her on her feet. She tried to run but her hind legs collapsed. As we climbed, she snapped and bit at her back where a red hole had appeared over her spine. She was tearing at herself when I lost sight of her as the plane turned and Sonny whooped. When I spotted her again, she was dragging herself into the sparse shelter of a creosote bush.

"Got the bitch!" Sonny yelled. He slapped the vent window shut. "You see her hit the dirt? We'll find her and skin her out tomorrow."

I thought of the animal panting the remainder of her life out in the hot air, trying to run, taking hours to die.

"OK, geologist, got one more thing you might like

to see." The Piper was paralleling the ridge again. Sonny continued north for a few minutes, then banked toward the upthrust. As the rocks seemed to reach toward us, Sonny pointed below and to the left. "There."

I couldn't see anything – rocks, and deep, lunar shadow. But when I looked closer I could see a faint jeep track across the desert.

"That way, right there in the shade of that rise."

The shadow was tight against the slope. It was just a bit too round.

"It's a blue-hole. Like the one over to Santa Rosa, I think. Water in it, too. No tellin' what's down in it – no bottom. Lot of coyote carcasses." He laughed.

The old cowboys used to think all of the Bottomless Lakes, "bottomless" because a weighted lariat could not measure their depths, were connected underground. I had heard tales of a body appearing in one lake after a man drowned in another. And some of them, indeed, were effectively bottomless: Blue-hole was a water-filled volcanic vent that mazed and drowned divers regularly.

I suddenly had a vision of underground faults and flow fractures connecting all the water under the entire area, but I resisted the impulse to check the spectrometry. The chances that Sonny had found a hole out there that hadn't been mapped were very slim.

Sonny chuckled and banked the Piper to head back to the strip.

Sonny's trailer was parked off by itself about thirty miles outside of Hobbs. It was in a different location than it had been, but it was the same wreck he had lived in ten years ago – pale blue, sagging in the middle, and pocked with bullet holes. Outside the front door was the same old refrigerator full of cases of beer, locked with a chain that leaked rust down cracked paint. There was a newish jeep parked on the hardpan of the yard near a dilapidated toolshed.

The sun was about to set by then, and the evening had cooled down, but the inside of Sonny's trailer was like a furnace. We went in only long enough to drop my bags in the tiny front bedroom, long enough for me to take in the clutter of dirty dishes and underwear, and notice the smell. Then we went outside to the old couch on the western side of the trailer and sat in the last red light of the day.

We drank a case of Lone Star, and Sonny told me again how well he was doing, how much better than the other idiots who had worked the rigs. Life was fine all the way around. But if Sonny hadn't changed much, I guess I had. After a while, I didn't have much to say to him. So we sat and listened to the bats and the desert night sounds. I think it was then that I realized for the first time how much like my father Sonny really was.

I finally asked him about Tularosa. She had been a barefooted, half-wild girl when I left, about seventeen. I hadn't known what to do with her then, but Sonny had. I'd never seen eyes like hers, blue-violet and huge. I still wanted her, sometimes.

He took another hit of his beer and looked at me. "Shit, Rose disappeared about a year ago." He began to peel the label off the sweating bottle. I thought





about those calloused hands touching her. "I'm sorry about her, Jimmy. She was a sweet little bitch, and I just thought I'd get to know her a little better. You know how it is."

I knew how it was.

"So, you ain't there looking for oil. Nobody's lookin' for oil. What is it, then?"

"Water," I said. "It was that or nothing."

"Yeah."

I didn't know what time it was when I finally got to bed. After the long, hot drive, the plane, and all the beer, all I remember is hazily kicking my way into the front bedroom of the trailer and collapsing among the underwear and litter on the bed. The night sounds continued outside of the window, and I could hear Sonny talking to himself in the other bedroom. I didn't sleep well that night. I tossed and sweated and I had a vivid dream about my granddad.

I was a very small boy, but my grandpa was already an old man. We were driving the hot dirt roads of the oil fields in his old pickup, out in the middle of nowhere, when granddad jammed on the brakes and the truck slid to a dust-spewing stop. There was nothing to see but scrub and desert, but granddad opened the driver's side door and started toward the back of the truck. After a minute he called me out and showed me why he had stopped: there was a rattlesnake in the road. My granddad killed any rattler, any snake for that matter, that he saw. He looked at it as a practical thing to do.

He was standing by the side of the road, with his long-handled shovel smashing down the stump of the snake's neck so that its mouth was open. The snake's body wasn't attached. He had run it over and then gone back to kill it with the shovel. Grandpa bent down and pried up the rattler's teeth with his pocket knife to show me how the fangs were tucked back until the snake actually bit. The dead rattler made me feel twitchy. The fangs were like glass needles. As I was looking at the open mouth I caught a glimpse of movement out of the corner of my eye and yelped. I could already feel the fangs of the second rattler in my calf, imagined a mother snake carrying a hundred deadly baby snakes around in her mouth. My granddad jumped at my squeal, and then he glared at me.

The movement was the decapitated body of the dead snake thrashing around several feet off of the road. Grandpa walked over to it and stepped on its spine, bent over, and cut the buttons off its tail. Its body was as big around as my leg. As grandpa and I returned to his truck, I kept looking back over my shoulder at the dead snake that was still writhing in a broken-backed, arching, climbing movement.

Grandpa gave me a set of rattles from an old cigar-box he kept in his kitchen.

I came awake in the dark trailer. It must have been the pop of cooling metal that woke me, though at first some hypnagogic recall of sobbing lingered. My mother had cried like that at night. I used to hear her through the walls when I was a kid. I had been hearing her again, lately. I got out of bed, brushed aside old clothes and towels, and shuffled my way to the window. It was a clear, windless night outside. An indistinct movement near the old couch caught my attention; I thought for just a moment that

I had seen the skinny, tattooed man from The Rigger out beside the front end of the trailer. But it was as if someone had evaporated into the atmosphere, no one was outside. Still vaguely uneasy, I went back to bed.

My grandpa was a hard man in his way, and he never got along with my dad, I didn't know why until I was bigger, but he liked me. He had a red face, white hair, large stubby-fingered hands with broken knuckles as big as pecans, and I think he chewed tobacco. He always wore a hat – an old fedora, not a cowboy hat – with rattlesnake buttons tucked in the band.

I kept hearing the sound of voices in my dreams that night, my mom yelling in the next room, the sound of flesh hitting flesh when my dad hit her.

I was hung over in the morning. I woke a little after sunrise and staggered into the kitchen. I needed coffee. There was a pot already waiting on the stove, but there was no sign of Sonny. The place was an incredible wreck, and only my experience as a geologist helped me find my way through the sedimentary layers of garbage in the kitchen to the refrigerator; there was nothing in it but a jug of catsup, a carton of milk that clotted when I poured it in my coffee, some bread, and a few slices of curled bologna.

I was choking down a slice of Rainbow Bread when it hit me that the smell wasn't composed only of rotting garbage. I swallowed hard and headed for the john. I had expected to find the toilet backed up. But though the bathroom would have choked a maggot, the smell was coming from somewhere else. I traced it to Sonny's bedroom; I wished that I hadn't. There was a loop of chain stapled through the paper thin walls of Sonny's closet and attached to a stud behind. The loop of chain was welded to a pair of handcuffs. The closet was damp – crusted with shit and, I think, pieces of hair and skin. It was bad, but the smell was worse than even that could account for. I didn't want to look any more.

Someone had been in that closet. Someone who had cried and tried to get away. Sonny had finally rubbed my face in it. I searched the area around the trailer, but didn't find a trace of anyone. The shed was open, empty, only a few coyote hides tacked to one wall. There was no phone in the trailer, and all I could think of was getting to Sonny. The truck was gone, but the jeep was still in the yard, and the keys were inside. I probably should have gone to the police, but all I could think of was that Sonny couldn't have taken her into town. I felt sick that I hadn't known about him, or that maybe I had.

There was no way I could beat Sonny to the airport, but I thought I knew where he had gone. I knew I had to do something.

I rammed myself across the desert for two hours with the jeep punching me in the kidneys as it bounced over brush and rock and ravine. It was straight up noon when I reached the area where Sonny had shot the coyote the day before. It took me another hour or so to find the little landing strip. But the plane wasn't on the strip; it had come down about a hundred metres east.

The Piper hadn't burned, but pieces of the plane were scattered in an arc that began several hundred metres south of the wreck at a spot where Sonny had banked too tight and clipped the vegetation with one wing of the plane. The Piper had cartwheeled in, but

it had stayed amazingly intact. There was no fire, but I could smell fuel, so I checked out the cabin quickly and got out of there. There was no one inside.

I found the girl's body about thirty metres south of the plane near a patch of rabbitbrush. It was clear from some distance that she was dead; the body was bunched up and twisted against a piece of the Piper's wing, and her head was turned to face back over her left shoulder. I sat down beside her and cried. It was too late for me to do anything, anything at all.

Her hands were still tied behind her with a piece of wire. The pale skin of her arms was torn, and green bruises discoloured her back and thighs. She was naked except for a pair of nylon panties.

The snake was behind her body in the shade beneath the wing. When I pulled her away from the wreckage, the rattler hit just above my boot top. I watched it wind away from me as I held my burning calf, and knew immediately that I was in trouble; it would take hours to get back to Hobbs, a long time for venom to work in my blood. I made myself get up and walk calmly toward the jeep though I could feel my heart begin to race.

But my situation was even worse than that; I heard the jeep start as I walked toward it. A plume of dust washed back over me as the jeep pounded away over the desert. Sonny was alive, then. My day pack was gone, and so was the canteen. There was nothing of much use in my pockets – some gum, a book of matches from The Rigger – not even a pocket knife. I sat for a few minutes; the sun beat on my skull, and my head throbbled. I had to get out of the sun and stay quiet.

I kept telling myself that I wouldn't die. If the venom had entered an artery, maybe, but I would have known about that, quick.

I decided that staying near the wreck was the best idea. The only real hope that I could make it out of there was for someone to find the crash site and me with it. So I set myself up near the wing section in the shade of the big clump of rabbit brush and opened up the meaty part of my calf with a sharp piece of the Piper so the bite would at least bleed out. But even in the shade, the heat bored into me. I had to get into some better shelter, and the only place I could think of was that pothole Sonny had pointed out from the air. I knew I shouldn't be walking around, but I didn't really have a choice.

By the time I had made it up the slope to the edge of the hole, I was throwing up and seeing odd things in the corners of my vision. I rested there, and it took me another hour or so to work my boot off. My foot had swollen tremendously. I couldn't see the bottom of the formation from the edge, but I could see chiseled steps in one wall. I made my way down in a haze of pain and rested again in the shade. There was a deep, cold pool of water in the bottom of the pothole.

As the sun set, a cloud of swallows dove out of the rock. My vision had slipped to false colour, and I saw them as vapour streaks in the hot air; they glowed with water-light.

I was breathing in shallow panting gulps. My leg was numb, but my back hurt; my spine felt as if it were being crushed by the limestone weight of the escarpment. There were at least three skinned coyote carcasses close to the water. The well smelled of death

and water tinged by flesh. Either the water or my leg smelled, I thought. I couldn't figure how anything could smell that way.

And then I thought I knew where the water must come from, from the dead in the ground, the things the dead do in the ground. There was a sump of body liquids prying into the buried coral reef and gone into caves, swallows living in broken limestone and diving out of the rock. All the piss and come and saliva inside the desert, it all disappeared underground. Cactus bodies leached through the soil, and only fruit flies mark those places on the surface. They were all part of an intricate bio-geological mechanism.

I could see it all happening there in my dark pocket as the water lights came up and then grew and changed. The well blazed up in green witch-light. Then the pulse drums quieted, and the lights began to fade. I must have fallen asleep or passed out.

When I woke again it was night. The air was hot and thick with the smell of night-blooming cactus. One bright slice of moonlight cut into a corner of the dark in the pothole. I was lying in a pool of blackness, and I couldn't seem to move. I could hear small things rustling in the shadow.

As I noticed Sonny standing in the chip of moonlight near the water, a litany began to run through my brain: helectite, stalactite, stalagmite, cave ice, cave ice, cave ice. But Sonny's face turned in my direction anyway, and his eyes picked me out of the black. I blinked my eyes, and he had disappeared. I blinked again, and he was beside me.

He kicked me in the ribs, and lights exploded in my head. I squeezed my eyes shut. Grainstone, I thought, bedded strata, algal mats, evaporite.

Sonny kicked me again... and then again in the face, head, kidneys. I could feel things breaking in me. There are caves in the reef, I thought. There are caves in the reef, and the caves' hands, white twisted helectites – rock stems, each finger broken, struck out of any true shape. Deformed crystalline structures force each hollow centre to spine-curl in the vaults, dark and waxed, flown over by bees.

"Bitch!" he said, and kicked me for emphasis. "Bitch, bitch, fuckin' bitch! I knew you were gonna find out. Soon as I saw you I knew you were still chasin' that little bitch. Shit, I'm glad you came!"

Sonny twisted one hand in my collar and began dragging me across broken limestone toward the water. Moonlight frosted his hair as he pulled me out of the shadow. He dropped me and turned. Pulling a skinning knife out of his boot, he walked away from me.

And then everything went quiet. I thought for a second that my hearing had gone. Sonny moved away from me as if he were walking through solidifying air. I pulled my arm across my eyes and then looked at my hands. I could see every crease in my palms. I watched as Sonny slowly bent and pulled the girl's body out from behind a jumble of boulders against the back wall of the pothole. There was a smear of darker colour on the wall, the mouth of a cave or a cleft in the rockfall. Sonny cut the girl's panties off and stuffed them in his back pocket. I wanted him dead with all the passion I had.

He twisted his fingers in her hair and began to drag her toward the pool. There was sound again – rock shifting beneath the girl's body, a hot buzzing in the air. Behind them, phosphor pale shapes began to move in the dark mouth of the cave.

Sonny's colourless skin caught the moonlight as he turned toward the cave. The planes of his skull were bright and his eyes and cheeks looked hollow. He seemed not to see anything, but the vague phosphor glow suddenly coalesced into a tight ball, like a nest of tiny snakes or a tangle of animate helectites. The mass erupted from the mouth of the cave toward Sonny's face. It hit and sank through Sonny's dark eye-pits into his head. Sonny didn't move for a second, and I could hear myself whimpering.

Nothing happened. He turned back and pulled the body to the edge of the well and rolled it in. The water closed over her, quietly. But I knew it wasn't over. My vision had gone to false colour, and I could see moisture, like a phantom column, rising from the well. As I watched, the column flared white, and I saw insects glittering in the light, bats plummeting in from the dark and away again with insects in their teeth. Sonny stumbled back with one arm shading his eyes.

My pulse pounded in my ears and throat. The tiny space-grown crystal in my head emitted light to the photomultiplier in my retina. I could see it all, everything around me, as if the earth had bared itself. The lights came up in complex patterns: regions with increased gamma field intensities corresponded to geological structures. I was surrounded by fractures, faults, porous zones. A glowing labyrinth of highly radioactive abyssal waters circulated deep in these structures. The waters were all moving toward me, and the beating was in the air, in the ground. I pulled myself up against a fallen slab and got to my feet as light rose in a column from the pool. Sonny spun to face me.

"Stop it!" he yelled. "What's happening?"

"You killed her," I said, and Sonny stumbled back toward the cave.

But he could see the things moving inside, then. Pinned between the column of light and the dark mouth of the cave, Sonny panicked and bolted for a crumbled section of the wall. Scrabbling on the loose stone, he clawed his way upward. But the water-lines were converging on the well, braiding together in glowing fracture trails as if the subsurface formations were melting and joining.

Sonny reached for the top of the wall. A bright web of fracture trails surged up the column of moisture and the light began to bend and move slowly. The web became a pattern of transparent scales, and the column slid against the wall, then arched like a woman's back. I could feel the power in it. A blunt head reared into the air, and then my leg collapsed and I hit the slab of limestone hard as I went down. For a moment I couldn't see. Then I saw the moon, but no water-lights, no glowing serpent sliding from the well. And it was dark in that hole.

I was scared. I curled up tight against the slab and concentrated on being quiet. But it wasn't me, I thought. It wasn't me that called that thing out.

I could still smell a faint hint of decay in the air, but it was nearly overlain by the smell of water – cold,

mineralized water. It smelled the way I remembered a small lake deep down in the lower levels of a cavern had smelled when I had gone caving once near Carlsbad, wet rock and water in the dark.

I heard Sonny kicking his way up the rockfall and pulling himself over the top. I felt a subsonic rumble through my bones and heard the scraping sound of an enormous body dragging over stone. Something very big, as if an arroyo were moving its bed over the rock, crushing its banks with its weight. I heard Sonny fall back into the hole, but the ground didn't quiet.

For the rest of that night I lay cold and sick in the dark. Toward morning, the noises stopped and the skinny man came to get me. The tattoo-webs on his skin glowed green, and he had Tularosa's blue-violet eyes. I remember him helping me to stand, and I remember making my way up the rock stairway out of the hole; it must have taken me hours, and I passed out several times. Sometimes the guy was there beside me, and sometimes I was alone. I talked to Tularosa.

It was day by the time I made it to the wreck. My leg was huge and clammy white streaked with black and green, meat red where it had split from the swelling. I knew I wasn't going to make it without help, but the jeep was nowhere in sight. Then Tularosa reminded me about the matches. I threw some creosote brush and a few lit matches in the wreck, and a column of black smoke rose into the morning. I don't remember them coming to get me.

**I** was in the hospital in Albuquerque for almost three weeks, staring out of my window at the Sandias. I missed Sonny's funeral; I felt bad about that, God knows why.

The state police visited me a few days before my release. A black-uniformed police captain by the name of Cordova came to check on my association with Sonny. I hadn't heard the details of Sonny's career until then; the authorities were trying to keep it quiet for as long as possible. They had already found the remains of eight women and girls, and they thought there were probably more. Three of the graves had been in the damp caliche under Sonny's trailer. One of the graves, the forensics man believed, held the bones of Tularosa Luna. The other bodies had been tossed into the well at the bottom of the pothole. The police had found Sonny there a week after they had located me near the wrecked plane.

They never would have found him if I hadn't told them where to look. His body was wedged into a small cave near the rockfall. His hands were both crushed and his spine was broken.

Cordova said that Sonny had lived for several days and had managed to pull his mangled body three quarters of the way out of the cleft. But the autopsy had been difficult, Cordova said, because coyotes had been at the body.

It was tempting, immobilized in that bed and crawling around in my own past, to attempt to find a reason for Sonny – the ruin and death in the oilfields, something some woman must have done to him – maybe because of a certain fear I had that I and other men might be like him somehow, fundamentally. My dad was, in a smaller way. But I know, now, that I'm not. Maybe some people are just born damaged like that, in ways the rest of us are not capable of understand-

ing. I asked them to take the hardware out of my head. I didn't intend to go looking for any water for Texans. I didn't know what it was that killed Sonny, me or them or something else, and I didn't want to.

September was almost gone by the time I returned to the south. I had flown in a chartered Cessna to pick up my car in Hobbs, intending to make the drive back to Albuquerque late in the afternoon; but I was still a bit weak, and I had a hole in my leg the size of a fist after the final clean-up surgery around the bite. It was almost as big as the hole in my life. By the time I had been driving for an hour, my leg was about to kill me, so I decided not to push myself and found a motel room in Roswell for the night.

The room was a shabby, hot, little cubicle; I sweated on the dingy bedspread for an hour or so, then decided to find some dinner. I was a touch light-headed, and the room seemed airless.

There was a dance going on at the hall next to the motel; music blared out of the opened double-doors and trucks pounded through the hard-packed clay ruts of the parking lot throwing dust into the air. Drunk, laughing couples straggled about the sidewalk and the street. I was making my way slowly among the trucks when I saw her out at the edge of the sodium-yellow security lights.

Initially I felt only an astounded sort of pleasure – that the police had been wrong. Her face was shadowed by her stetson and she was half turned away from me, but the yellow lights caught that long tail of blond hair and the curve of her hip in the tight jeans, and I didn't have any doubts. She was standing with a guy – a big, rough-looking boy, maybe nineteen. He laughed, slapped her on the butt and headed back to the hall.

"Tularosa!" I yelled. "Rose!" She didn't seem to hear me; she was walking slowly away from the lot as I hobbled around a black Chevy and tripped in a rut. "Rose!"

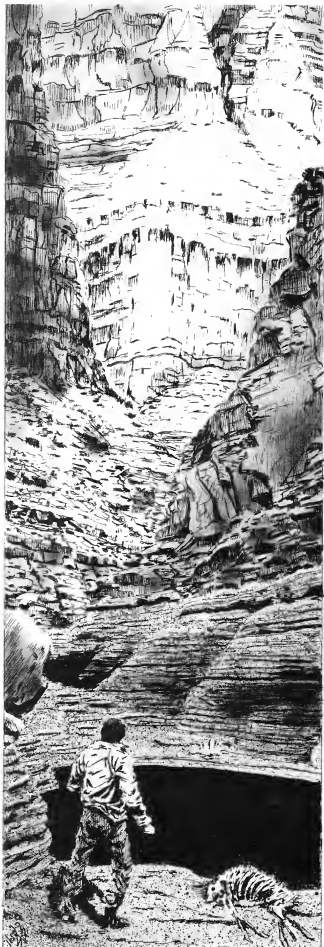
She turned, and it was all there again – as if the venom were still working in my bloodstream. Her blue eyes were as quiet and dark as the Permian, as remote.

I froze where I was, one hand clutching the chrome bumper of the Chevy. I could feel a vein throbbing in my forehead as her body seemed to flicker and then sharpen back into focus.

This is crazy. I've cracked, I thought as I caught the sharp, reptilian scent of her. I couldn't move. She was holding out a set of rattlesnake buttons. Again, I could almost hear the sound of that huge body moving over rock. I finally reached out and took them from her, and she smiled. The smile was as cool as a night-wind from the sea.

When she turned away, I was released. I dropped the buttons and watched her walk off. She had a black crow-feather tucked into her hatband. I saw it just as she was about to step out of that last circle of light at the edge of the Llano Estacado. The feather and another set of buttons were attached to a band made of blond hair, a thin straw-blond pigtail that had been tied around the stetson. I recognized it. It was Sonny's hair.

I had a sudden and very clear memory of my grandfather in his old battered hat showing me the snake's fangs, grinning at me. Sonny was a dangerous thing,



after all, a thing that needed to be gone. She turned back to me then, touched the brim of the stetson with its human hair band, and smiled. Something in my chest seemed to jump.

"Goodbye, Tularosa," I said, and she changed: a shine of scales glittered high on her cheekbones, her flesh attenuated, and spiderweb tattoos splashed themselves over her joints, then she turned and seemed to dissolve into the desert night.

**Terry Boren** lives in Alaska. She describes herself as "a native New Mexican of debatable ethnic heritage and random, though determined, education. I have had non-fiction published in various places, but only two science-fiction pieces: 'Sliding Rock,' which appeared in the anthology *A Very Large Array* edited by Melinda Snodgrass; and 'Alba in Directed Light,' which was selected by Rudolfo Anaya for his anthology *Tierra*. 'Three Views of the Staked Plain' is my first story publication in a magazine." She adds that she has been a teacher in the Navajo reservation, and is now in the middle of writing a novel.

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# The Speckless Cathedral

## Jonathan Lethem

“Should there be music?”  
“What, our song? We could play it backwards.”

“Did – do we have a song?”

“Or Dylan – ‘Sooner or later you’ll go your way –’”

I hated Saundra Beatitude, and she hated me. She was too tall and hard, not like a woman at all, really, more like some kind of predatory sculpture dressed in skin and leather and hairdo. And yes, she was fun to be with, for an hour or two. It was fun to watch her chainsmoke menthol pot and listen as she complained about the people she knew – often while sitting in their midst – but anyone who formed a relationship with her had to be completely insane –

Which brings us to me, I guess; Peter Louise Fittinger. The one who hated Saundra and the one who somehow loved her too, I guess. Anyway, we were stuck in the dribbling last stages of an interminable love affair, and no real end in sight. Oh, the relationship was over, certainly, it’s just that the fighting and the fucking wasn’t. And since fucking and fighting was all we ever did anyway – am I confusing you? We’d entered a null-space, you see, a void between a chance at happiness together and any kind of successful break, and the distance either way seemed equally impossible.

So we tried modelling our breakup on the computer. We set up a little HIS program, a little HERS, and fixed them up in a virtual relationship, threw in a lot of emotional baggage, crippling psychic scars and the like. Waited for the damned thing to devolve. It wouldn’t. We ran it through every scenario we could think of, injected the theorem brimful with hatred and boredom, but fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years up the line, HIS and HERS were still together. Yes, I stayed with her if she had a sex-change (in fact, the picture brightened somewhat, a detail she felt it was appropriate to needle me with) and yes, she stayed with me if my teeth all rotted out (they were working at it), I grew obese, or converted to Islam.

That made me feel a little better about failing out here, in the real world. It just couldn’t be done. I’d call her or she’d call me and we’d go from warily comparing our pain to ridiculing one another to sleeping together again, and it would spiral away from us, all the hard work we’d put in together to be apart.

Then we heard about NtroP, a new street drug. My good friend Rudy Messer told me about it, said it might be what I was looking for, and that he knew a guy –

“It was developed by the CIA as an anti-patriotism drug,” explained Rudy’s mysterious friend. “For debunking allegiance in EPOWS – enemy prisoners of war. But it wasn’t reliable enough for them, got shelved – you know. One of the lab people noticed the other effect, the personal thing. None of the guys who’d worked on the project were on speaking terms anymore, and it turned out their marriages had all gone down the tubes.”

“How’s it –”

“Like an hallucinogenic. A trip. You take it together, lock yourselves in a room and trip together. Done that before, right? Only at the end of this trip you find you’ve actually gotten somewhere. A trip with a destination. Last stop, everybody off.”

“And that’s it. The relationship is over.”

“That’s right.”

We waited until dark. Inevitably, the moment recalled others like it, explorations together, chemical ceremonies. The four little white tablets nested in her palm, looking almost iridescent. We downed them and entered that other null-space, the time between taking a drug and being taken by it. While we waited we fought: about the music, the food, unplugging the phone, and whether or not to take a last roll together.

“Let’s just see if we feel like it. We don’t even know –”

“I want to. I think it’s perfect. I want you in me while it happens, when I realize I don’t care any more.”

“I don’t think it’s all of a sudden like that. I think it’s more of a process –”

“God, you’re so uptight.”

“I don’t know, it just doesn’t seem right to want to, seeing as how –”

“Right to want, wrong to want. That’s just like you. What do you want?”

“Let’s wait and see? Do you –”

“Hate you already? Yes, it’s happening, oh God, I feel it coming, it’s like an orgasm of hate!” She shrieked with laughter, then gasped and laughed again. “Oh God, it was so good. Was yours good?”

"Cut it out. Be a little bit serious. Anyway, it's not a matter of hating me. If it were that we'd already be out of this."

"Okay." She sighed. "Is there anything to drink?"

Initially it was a trip like any other, everything digital and chocolate, while our synapses struggled to adjust. I'd doubled our doses to be safe, and it meant a rather long period of clinging to one another and bellowing commands and pleas and insights and insults across what seemed a void of star-strewn galaxies.

But soon enough we settled into that familiar half-lucid and half-idiotic crypto-profound sort of dialogue which means so much as it's uttered and ordinarily so little the day afterwards.

"It's incredible, you know, how fake it all is —"

"Fake incredible you mean."

"Yes fake incredible how we ascribe all this incredible fake importance to our fake emotions."

"You mean given that we're like infinitesimal specks on an empty flat surface moving through just such a tiny slice of time and space that it hardly even matters —"

"That's you. I'm not a speck."

"Fake pride. Fake pride."

"No, no. Fake insight. Fake metaphor. Listen: you're a speck. It's perfectly you. You're a speck moving around inside a huge empty cathedral, trying to inhabit it, trying to understand what it's doing in there, looking out through the stain glass windows for eyes, totally unable to see another person. Whereas I'm all on the outside, all encrustation and buttresses, I'm all cathedral and nothing inside. You live —"

"I'm wandering out now. The speck is wandering out of the cathedral. I'm sick of it."

"No, it's hopeless. You're lost in the basement."

"I am?"

"Don't be fake afraid —"

"I'm not. It's just —"

"What. Fake sympathy. What."

"It's a little sad, for the speck. That out of the windows of the cathedral there was only one little glow — but now there's nothing —"

"I know. It's fake sad. That not fake loving you any more means not getting to fake hate you any more either."

"I know. Our fake hate — it was beautiful."

"Fake beautiful."

"Yes."

"You shit, you poor-ass snake — oh no, oh God, it's slipping away —" She giggled. "I hope I can at least remember what a jerk you are, otherwise —" She disassembled in laughter.

"What?"

"I might make friends with you —" She gasped to keep from laughing again. "— and I don't want you for a friend."

"Thanks."

"Awww, don't be fake hurt. You know it doesn't fake mean enough to get all fake hurt about. Go back and look at the inside of the cathedral, speck. Go — speck yourself."

"That's Mister Speck to you."

The drug did what was claimed for it. There was no last fuck, either. It was simpler than I'd imagined;

we didn't care anymore. As the evening progressed, and we moved through intoxication, giddiness, and last flarings of dependence and bile, we emerged into a new world, one where Sandra was, well, smaller, principally. Very much still herself but more discrete, her boundaries no longer blurring with mine. She was so suddenly harmless I might have laughed, but I was incapable of even as profound an emotion as bemusement. Exhausted too, of course, from the physical ordeal, but there was no emotional hangover. I sought randomly in myself for any sense of depth, value or importance pertaining to her, and came only again and again to shallowness, distraction, dearth.

At the end she'd fallen asleep in the armchair, leaving me the bed. I woke early in the morning, still too wired to sleep properly, and stumbled away, leaving a short, polite note on the table. That was the last communication between us for several years.

At first I thought I'd gotten off scot-free. Our association was over, and the drug resulted in nothing like the conventional flashbacks I'd so feared. No, it was only visible from the outside, the awful truth, when it did emerge, about NtroP.

First went my livelihood. I worked as a jazz producer, entrusted with the delicate task of eliciting studio performances from musicians accustomed to live interplay and audience response — it had been one of my few talents, and loves.

"It doesn't relate." This was Stannard Mainway, my — or rather, Groundfog Records' — balky superstar, with whom I'd shown a previously golden touch. "I don't see it, you understand? I can't see why play the solo in there. It's got no place to go, there's no point —"

There's no point to jazz at all, and that's the point, I felt like saying, but instead I took him through it again, played the backing track and let the MAINWAY program extrapolate his solo again for him. He listened intently and shook his head. "It's not there."

"It's not all there, but you can surely see a way in — that's why you're here, Stan. To bring it home."

"Nope. It's not there. No connection. I rely on a feeling, babe —"

A feeling it was my job to provide, of course. But I seemed incapable of inspiring anything other than a sense of the futility of expression now. My presence in the studio seemed only to promote an intense awareness of the lack of relation between disparate parts, and of the absolute pointlessness of pretending that they did somehow relate.

A few weeks after our trip I was called into the front office by Sterling Groundfog.

"You know I was mad at you? I was, really, Peter, actually mad and I thought I was going to call you in here and fire you. But one look at you —" He took his cigar out of his mouth and switched it off, the red ember dying instantly. "I dunno, Pete. Something's not right, Stan's upset, the other players are upset, they say you're not there anymore. If I thought you were fucking up on purpose I would be mad, I swear I thought I was mad, but looking at you here —" He put down his cigar and got out of his seat. "I dunno. I should just send you on a vacation but why should I send you on a vacation? Do I give a shit? Does it matter? Aw jeez, what's the matter with me?" He went

and opened the window and took a deep breath of LA fog. "Okay, I called you in here because there was a problem, right?"

"Uh, right."

"And I'm supposed to like, wanna fix the problem, right? Aw, crap. I dunno what I'm talking about. This thing's got me feeling all empty inside—listen to me!"

**I**t was me—I was beginning to recognize the effect. My personal life, what there was of it after dropping out of Saundra's orbit, which if it had nothing else to recommend it was at the very least populated, had taken a similar turn. One night at an expensive uptown flirting salon I pulled up a seat at the bar, punched up a line on the network, and began inserting some comments into the conversational pool. Immediately I felt the energy onscreen dissipate. Conversationalists began dropping out of the network—I could hear them switching back to realtime conversations at the tables around me, though even those soon died out.

At about a quarter to twelve—just when the place should have achieved a real ferment of pheromones and photons, the proprietor, Evil Steve Pierglass, came on line.

"Listen folks, some nights it's got it and some nights it ain't. Tonight the magic ain't here. I'm closing up shop 'cause it pains me to see it founder like this—better now while you've got a chance of finding some other place to hang. Sorry. Goodnight." At that the screen blipped off, and a minute later the bartender yelled last call.

I went to a movie and couldn't help seeing how little the supposed lovers cared for one another, how little the actors cared for their director or their parts, couldn't keep from seeing how it all was riddled with indifference, until by the end I could only watch the sloppy pointless splicing of one section to another and think of how it was once a pile of disparate fragments and might as well have been thrown together at random, or, better, not at all.

It was in me, still, the NtroP. It was there between me and my perceptions, and it was leaking out of me too, to infect others. And I wasn't the only one, it turned out.

The side effects were common to the first wave of NtroP users, common enough that a scare had gone out, and we first would likely also be the last. I was typical, apparently, in the way I'd fallen through the safety net of my own life. "Watch the donut, not the hole," went an advisory song of my childhood, but unavoidably now I was fixed on the hole. And, understandably, it was difficult getting anyone interested in the problem.

So a foundation appeared, founded and staffed by sufferers who'd come far enough to want to reach out to the rest of us. Came the day I crawled through their entrance, bereft, mumbling and whispering out broken shards of speech.

**T**hey took me in. Gave me a hospital garment, a room and a roommate as hopeless as myself, and fifteen hours of therapy, group and solo, a week.

"Can't you see that you're not even listening to what she's saying? You're pretending to have a conversation

but the two halves don't connect —"

"Peter —"

"I mean you wouldn't even be here talking to one another if it weren't for some bizarre chain of coincidences, so why think there's any basis —"

"Peter we're trying to say that there might be some motive for wanting to flesh out the bizarre chain with some attempt at bridging the gulf — much more interesting and warmer too, don't you think, than just pointing it out again?"

"I can't help but feel incredibly bored that you're trying to patch this sort of feeble concept of 'interest' and then 'warmth' onto my very clear perception that there's absolutely nothing there —"

"God, Peter, you're always —"

"Good, Marcia, don't stop, say what you're feeling towards Peter right now."

"He's such a jerk!" she erupted, and wept. The group applauded this breakthrough.

"I don't, I mean, I just say what I'm thinking, what comes into my head. I don't know why I bother. I'm just trying to say that I'm not particularly fake interested in fake warmth and I don't feel any particular fake warmth about the idea of fake interest —"

I bottomed out of the group sessions, again and again, or the rest of the group graduated up around me; whichever it was I ended up alone each time, until they stopped trying. My solo work went on a bit longer, though I drove several of my counsellors back to lower levels by the sheer invasive force of my disinterest, glimpsed up close and alone.

"Let's talk about the woman you left, Peter. It was a woman, wasn't it? Who you took the drug with?"

"Uh, yes."

"Do you remember her name?"

"Sa — no."

"Is it possible it was a mistake? That you belonged together?"

"What — what would it mean to 'belong together'?"

Gentle laughter. Increasingly, as the others left me behind, I met with laughter. "You're different, Peter. You know that by now. Now, as silly as any idea of 'true love' is, even to me, I wonder if we might explore the possibility that in order to cut her out of your life you may have had to cut out large parts of yourself, too. More than any of the rest of us, I mean. The majority of yourself."

"I — I doubled the dose, you know. Have we bothered to talk about that, or was that someone else? Because I really think that the fake problem lies in some other fake direction than the especially fake fake fake —"

"It wasn't your dose, Peter. I myself took the drug several times. There are others who took more — but you know that."

"Oh, that was our conversation, then. I fake forgot."

**T**he foundation dissolved, its members all pulled up by their own and one another's bootstraps into a coherent life again. Leaving me behind. They did arrange for me to keep my room in the sanatorium, though my roommate's bed was empty, and for private care to continue. Their visits trailed away, understandably; how far could empathy extend? They'd done enough. I watched — or rather, dissected — a lot of television.



Then, one day just recently, they returned, bringing me a new roommate. "Someone like you, Peter. You two are the last, in fact. We're sure you'll find a lot not to say to each other." Saundra, of course, though we both pretended disinterest until our keepers were gone.

"I remember you."

"Yes. I remember you too."

"How fake ironic it is to have to look at you all day, after all this. You know, nobody else can stand me any more. That's why they brought me here. Is that why you're here?"

"Yup."

"You know I still fake hate your guts, if only just a little. What do you think of that?"

Her grin was the ugliest thing I'd seen in years.

"Darling," I said.

Now I understand my fate. Only if I can learn to love her again, can I be fully human. Only by working through my indifference and hate, back to that centre where I bathed in her glow. Only then will I be strong enough to leave her. Which I'll do, I swear, if it's the last thing I do. Which it obviously will be.



**Jonathan Lethem** is 27 and was born and raised in New York City. He now works as a bookseller in Berkeley, California. He has written song lyrics, some of which have been recorded, and has sold sf and fantasy stories to Asimov's, *Journal Wired*, *Pulphouse*, *SF Review* and the anthologies *The Year's Best SF* (Dozois, ed.) and *Universe 2*.

## Interaction

Continued from page 5

besides, I am studying English in University (1st year). That is why I want to know how to subscribe to this magazine, with payment in Soviet roubles (I have not any hard currency). If it is not impossible, send, if you please, even one copy of *Interzone*. Thanking you in anticipation.

**Yaroslav Mudrenko**

4, 14<sup>A</sup>, Kiev, 50 Let Oktyabrya street, Ukraine

**Editor:** We've sent him another issue, but can't afford to continue doing so indefinitely. See my remarks in the editorial of IZ 56.

Dear Editors:

As a long time reader of *Interzone*, I was particularly impressed with issue 53. Every story was outstanding. I was especially impressed with "Paradigms of Change" by Geoffrey Landis. Unfortunately, no information about Mr Landis was provided at the end of the story. I got the feeling this story may be part of a larger work. The theme would certainly provide for an intriguing novel. Could you provide some information about Mr Landis, and let us know if we can expect to see more of Virus X in the future.

**R. Baxter**

Denver, Colorado

**Editor:** Geoffrey A. Landis has contributed once before to *Interzone* — "Jamais Vu," issue 45 — and we hope to see more from him in the future. He has had a number of stories in Asimov's SF Magazine, including one, "Ripples in the Dirac Sea," which won a Nebula Award in 1990. Whether he'll write more about Virus X we can't say at present.

Dear Editors:

I read with interest and considerable surprise the reactions of James T. Hughes III to "Ten Days that Shook the World" (*Interaction*, IZ 55). This competent, workmanlike but unremarkable alternate-universe tale got right up this Yankee nose? But why? True, it was rather rude about poor old Tom Mix. But I do not think British readers would have gone over the top if the dissolute general had been identified as, say, Stanley Laurel. And why should the plot have offended the Hughes grandson? It's the Russian revolution — nothing offensive about that. And even if there was, why should the perfectly ordinary narrative style be likened to masturbation?

Could James T. Hughes be induced to carry out his promise/threat to expand on his reasons for hating this, to me unexceptional, tale? Has he read Pavane, *The Difference Engine*, or Amis's *The Alteration*, and if so was his reaction the same? I think I am not

the only *Interzone* reader who would like to know why two such standard-issue stories as "Ten Days" and "Hamelin, Nebraska" should get such different reactions from the same reader. Publication of the reasoning would assist British readers to understand the alien life forms living on the other side of the Atlantic.

**John Ward**  
Bristol

## WRITE TO INTERZONE

We enjoy receiving feedback from our readers, and we hope to publish a lively letters column in each issue. Please send your comments, opinions, reactions, to the magazine's main editorial address. We may not be able to reply to all letters, but we do read them and may well be influenced by them.

The past is not another country to Tim Powers: it's more like an adventure playground where he's not so much concerned with historic authenticity as with remixing genre archetypes with the verve and intensity of a rap master DJ. Previous novels have featured time travel, necromancy, werewolves and the Egyptian pantheon (*The Anubis Gates*), or amalgamated Caribbean piracy, zombies and magic (*On Stranger Tides*). His latest, *The Stress of Her Regard* (Grafton, £14.99), enters into an intricate account of vampiric possession by way of the aftermath of the summer night, long passed into myth, when two poets, their respective mistresses, and a physician, all wasted on opium and laudanum, frightened each with ghost stories and laid the foundations for "The Vampyre" and for *Frankenstein*.

Any writer retelling the often fictionalized story of the cabal of Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Mary Godwin, Claire Clairmont and Dr John William Polidori must do so with the knowledge that the spoor of his predecessors will be implicit (if not explicit) in his text; indeed, you half expect to spot Brian Aldiss lurking in the vineyards around the Villa Diotima, or Ken Russell training his jittery lenses from the deck of a white steamer anchored offshore. Powers gets around this fictional equivalent of *déjà vu* by doing what he does best: slamming straight into fifth gear and wrenching his tatterdemalion plot around hairpin bends at high speed, snatching at fragments of revelation along the way and patching them into some kind of sense before the final dramatic denouement upon which the course of history depends.

He begins, not at the beginning, but four days after that fateful night. Byron and Shelley are crossing Lake Lemano when a squall rises up around their boat – no ordinary storm, but the fury of one of the lamia that haunt Shelley and about which he knows a good deal more than is to be revealed to the reader at that moment. For after the lamia's defeat, and the hint that Byron shares something of Shelley's burden, Powers cuts to the real beginning of the novel, and the introduction of its hero, Michael Crawford, an obstetrician on the eve of his second marriage.

It is Crawford who takes up the weight of exposition in this long, complex and satisfying novel. In a foolish moment during the drunken revels of his stag night he places his ring on the finger of a statue, and so becomes wedded in spirit to one of the lamia. After his wedding night he wakes from dreams of vampiric consummation to find his bride horribly crushed beside him, and because his first wife also died in mysterious circumstances he is automatically suspect. He flees from

mob justice and the vengeance of his schizophrenic sister-in-law Josephine to London, where he is aided by a young surgeon's dresser called John Keats, and learns not only of the supernatural contract he has entered into and something of his doom, but also of an underworld society of those who find the bloodletting involved in such contracts sexually arousing. Crawford has become the unwilling consort of a lamia from an ancient age of silicon life that predates that of carbon, a jealous creature that can bestow not only creative genius but also a kind of immortality.

Crawford flees across the Channel, is helped by a poet far older than he seems, and finally meets Byron, who, like him, is seeking a divorce. Dogged by Josephine, Crawford and Byron finally win freedom high in the Alps, yet are still enmeshed within the growing power of the lamia and the struggles of the society of the aptly-named carbonari which seeks to defeat the lamias' plans to change human history. In true pulp style it is Crawford, aged and weakened almost fatally by his ordeals, whose surgical skills and obscure knowledge enable him to sever the link between the lamia and humankind.

*The Stress of Her Regard* reiterates many of the themes of Powers' other novels, but with greater ambition and intensity. There's a secret history and a plot in which an ordinary man is caught up in events which send him on a headlong and frequently violent journey towards revelation; a tormented hero whose suffering is graphically physical; a skilful blending of melodrama and the lives of historical figures (this isn't Byron's first appearance in a Powers novel). There is also a heroine who is the strongest of Powers' female characters to date: Josephine's suffering in pursuit of vengeance mirrors that of Crawford, and Powers not only achieves a credible amnesty between the two, but develops it into a tragic and desperate romance that is redeemed not only by the getting of wisdom and self-knowledge, but also by the strength which each lends the other.

Not all of it works quite as well as it should. Mary Godwin never quite steps out the shadows; Lord Byron, exuberantly portrayed for most of the novel, diminishes at the end to allow Crawford to gain centre stage; and after a skilful conjuration of John Keats, Powers merely reintroduces him on his death bed as a pawn in the crucial struggle between the forces of the lamia and Crawford's conscience. The headlong pace of the sprawling complex plot sometimes collapses into expository monologues as if Powers himself wasn't quite sure what was going on, and occasionally (but not as frequently as in *On Stranger Tides*) his characters jarringly lapse into 20th-century demotic. But these are small faults in a long exuberant novel in which the joy of making shines out from every page. Powers' novels have always been notable for the intricacy of the secret histories which underlie their plots, and here he combines the significance of the obsession of the Romantic movement with landscapes, the tragic destinies of so many of the Romantic poets, and a dense reweaving of vampire myths, into an exhilarating blend of horror and scientific and historical romance.

"In any sf narrative," Kim Stanley Robinson asserts (in "Notes for an essay on Cecelia Holland," *Foundation* 41), "there is an explicit or implicit fictional history that connects the period depicted to our present moment, or to some moment in our past." It's a declaration made manifest in the stories of Robinson's second collection, *Remaking History* (Tor, \$18.95), most explicitly in "A Sensitive Dependency on Initial Conditions," which mixes non-linear dynamics, quantum theory and a spectrum of speculative alternative histories around the dropping (or not) of the A-bomb on Hiroshima. It is a deft, humanist and accomplished piece, part fiction, part essay, part something else, which works baroque fugues and variations on the premise of Robinson's earlier story "The Lucky Strike."

This theme – the place of the indi-

# Through the Past, Darkly

## Paul J. McAuley

vidual in history's summated wave function – informs most of the other stories. "A History of the Twentieth Century, with Illustrations" follows a historian suffering from clinical depression as he travels from New York through England and Scotland to the Orkneys and considers whether to write the text for a coffee-table book. The sense of swimmers adrift in history's stormy sea, of dark waters closing overhead, as the historian meditates on the nature of history in general and that of humankind's most turbulent century in particular, is informed by Robinson's evocative and particular descriptions of place. All we can do, he suggests, is hope: but hope is also our strength. And so, in "Glacier" (which echoes Le Guin's "The New Atlantis"), a kind of fascism has overtaken the U.S. and glaciers are sweeping down the north-eastern seaboard, and yet a kind of domestic, human scale of intellectual community persists; and in "The Lunatics," at once both the strangest and most science-fictional story in the collection, miners following veins of the eldritch element promethium, which perpetually radiates energy and may be the nervous system of the Moon, achieve freedom from slavery, even if only for a moment.

It's a rare short-story collection that maintains a high level of internal coherence. Remaking History is one of them, a deep and wide-ranging collection of fictions infused by a sharp, wide-ranging and restless intelligence, humane and humorous, full of the celebration of the thinness of things.

**T**wo short notes on books that have ghosted into view from the limbo of the unpublished. Alfred Bester's *Tender Loving Rage* (Tafford, \$19.95) is a headlong and breathless thriller set in New York in the late '50s, concerning two headstrong geniuses, one a biologist, the other an advertising wizard, who find themselves rivals for the love of the same girl, a model who Has a Past, which catches up with her (and them) on Fire Island, along with a wild party and a storm. The relationship between the two men, rivals who recognize each other as coevols, echoes that of Ben Reich and Lincoln Powell in *The Demolished Man*; the controlled crossfire chaos of the climax echoes the pyrotechnics of *Tiger!* *Tiger!*. Those two sf novels are amongst some of the best written; *Tender Loving Rage*, while it has some of the longueurs of a draft rather than a finished novel, more than reflects their greatness.

Norman Spinrad's previously unpublished *The Children of Hamelin* (Tafford, \$19.95) is set a half decade later than Bester's, yet seems more dated, possibly because of the verisimilitude with which it portrays the

hippy, dippy days of New York in the mid-60s. There is the Doing Drugs Scene and the Free Sex Scene (which comes off as embarrassingly chauvinist) and a blackly comedic account of the workings of a reader-fee Literary Agency. And the ending, in which the hero wises up and finds his niche in commercial publishing, is amazingly prescient in light of the late career moves of most of the avatars of Love 'n' Peace. In between, there's a plot in which the appallingly right-on hero is sucked into mind-power games of the Foundation for Total Consciousness and its low-rent guru, but since it mostly consists of said hero trying to make up his mind, it isn't very gripping – nor does it take up much of the book. What's more interesting is the grittily accurate and honest account of streetwise life in a vanished, more hopeful era.

#### Also Noted:

Robert Pirsig published *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, a travelogue and a manual of soul enrichment that became a bestseller, in 1974. His second book, *Lila* (Bantam Press, £14.99), is about an author who wrote a bestseller about motorbikes and zen sailing from Lake Superior to Florida via the New York State canal system, and is also a sustained meditation on "goodness" and "quality" which takes as its case the soul-damaged eponymous woman he's picked up along the way. It is a gentle, rambling book, a kind of autobiographical novel of ideas with an embedded philosophical text. There are sustained passages of brilliance (a hymn to New York and an edgy meeting with Robert Redford; a discourse on the clash between the iron souls of the Victorians and the ways of the American Indians which blended into the making of modern America), and long passages that verge on incoherence and which may contain insights that will illuminate the last decade of the 20th century, or which may simply be hermetic metaphysical babble. History, as the saying goes, will decide.

In *The Life and Death of My Lord Gilles de Rais* (Abacus, £5.99), Robert Nye recounts the last days of the historical model for Bluebeard, one-time companion of Joan of Arc and the Dennis Nilson of his day. Through the memoirs of de Rais's naive and self-pitying priest, Nye evokes an authentic sense of spiritual malaise and the banality of evil without recourse to graphic details of the paedophilia and murders for which de Rais was put to death. At once terrible and full of pity, never faltering in its vivid depiction of the medieval world, it is a richly detailed novel of true gothic horror.

(Paul J. McAuley)

**Editor:** John Clute is not able to be with us this month, as he struggles to complete *The Encyclopedia of SF*, 2nd edition (see his comments, *lost issue*). He should be back in the lead review slot of issue 58.

## Authentic Space Opera

### Brian Stableford

**T**he first volume of Stephen Donaldson's "Gap" series, *The Gap into Conflict: The Real Story*, was little more than a novella, which was extended to a healthier book length by the addition of an afterword in which the author explained the ideative underpinnings of the entire project. Now we have *The Gap into Vision: Forbidden Knowledge* (HarperCollins, £14.99). The second volume is much more substantial, but is by no means complete in itself, comprising the first slice of what will presumably be a true leviathan among four-decker novels. Here the much-abused Morn Hyland, temporarily in control of the zone implant in her brain which will enslave her to anyone who gets hold of it, must engage in a protracted battle of wits with her hateful "rescuer" Nick Succorso, at first on her own behalf and later on behalf of the child fathered on her by the even more hateful Angus Thermopyle. Angus, meanwhile, is being enslaved himself, and readied for the dangerous mission which he must undertake for his godlike masters against their Protean adversaries, the Amnion.

Donaldson's fans will undoubtedly find the present volume much more comfortable than its predecessor, because he is by nature and by vocation a writer of very long novels, whose strengths only become apparent when he has adequate *lebensraum*. This may seem slightly odd, given that he is a writer who focuses with unremitting intensity upon the emotions of his key characters, but there is no paradox involved. The essence of Donaldson's artistry – and, one presumes, the key to his success – is his ability to construct narrative crescendos which build and build and keep on building, unremittingly, until they have reached a pitch which no composer of texts has ever attained before. He is a writer who may always have problems in marketing his works, because the ideal way to read him is probably to wait until you have all the volumes of his multi-volume works in hand before starting at the beginning and reading straight through to the end. Those who read his works as they are initially emitted by the publishers, one volume at a time, are always likely to find themselves

hanging over some pretty steep cliffs in the intervals. The first two volumes of the original *Chronicles of Thomas Covenant* had endings far more rounded than *Forbidden Knowledge*, but queues still formed in bookshops as the publication days of the later volumes came around.

Donaldson's move from high fantasy to science fiction was, on the surface, a brave decision, even though the two genres overlap to a considerable extent in their marketing and their readership. Modern publishing wisdom asserts that female readers, on average, prefer the fantasy end of the imaginative fiction spectrum while male readers, on average, prefer the hard-sf end; the same wisdom would probably judge that the highly emotional nature of Donaldson's writing is more likely to appeal to female readers. It is probable, though, that Donaldson qualifies by now as one of those writers who are virtually one-man genres in their own right, and the Gap series is a perfectly natural step in his continuing evolution away from the Tolkienesque imagery of the first *Covenant* three-decker. It is certainly the case that he does not seem at all uncomfortable or unskilful working with most of the science-fictional motifs in *Forbidden Knowledge*, and the series of mechanical crises which he manufactures in the latter part of the novel to move the plot along enable him to pick up more narrative drive and tension than any of the magical devices in his earlier novels ever did. Dedicated sf fans may feel mildly puzzled and dismayed by his failure to offer elaborate accounts of the whereabouts of the places visited by the starship on which almost all the action takes place (I must admit that I would have been grateful for that old high fantasy cliché, the map) but they have no grounds for complaint about the way in which the shipboard computers and other apparatus are employed as a continual source of problems and opportunities for the characters to solve and seize.

Most of the unanswered questions about the background of *Forbidden Knowledge* are hangovers from *The Real Story*. In a novella it is perfectly acceptable to be vague in such matters of detail as where exactly the "belt" is that the miners are working, and what exactly the ore is that they are extracting, and why exactly it is so valuable to the pirates who are avid to steal it. *Forbidden Knowledge* begins to answer these questions, but it is not really a continuation of the story told in the novella – rather, it is the first volume of a far more massive work which has gobbled up the meaty characters from the earlier work and has been obliged in consequence to find a way of digesting the grisly background against which their vivid

melodrama was more-or-less-arbitrarily set.

As the afterword to *The Real Story* explained, *Forbidden Knowledge* is the first part of a science-fictional version of Wagner's Ring Cycle – an authentic Space Opera! – and the novella's characters are rather more readily adaptable to that purpose than its incidental detail. The info-dumping chapters of *Forbidden Knowledge* struggle manfully with the task of adaptation, but they also have work to do on their own account, and the author will have to box clever in subsequent volumes to maintain the coherency of his scheme. If he can do that – and there is every reason to hope that he will – then he will have accomplished something that he has never done before. In fact, it is arguably the case that no one else has done it either; for instance, Isaac Asimov's attempts to bring belated coherency to the "Foundation" series, with or without robots, seem to be an extended exercise in papering over cracks.

Science fiction does, after all, demand more of the writer of multi-volume novels than high fantasy does. In high fantasy the battle is always to preserve a world whose ideal form is already implicit, but in science fiction the task of true heroes is to transform the world in hitherto unsuspected ways: to bring about progress. At present – that is to say, at the end of *Forbidden Knowledge* – all Donaldson's characters, whether they be hero, villain or victim (and *The Real Story* has already promised us that these roles may be as Protean as the alien Amnion) are fighting with very extraordinary desperation simply to survive; eventually, they will have to do much more. It will be interesting to find out what, and how, they do it. After the destined *Götterdämmerung*, when the men on whose behalf Morn Hyland and her son are fighting their battles become free to work out their own destiny, what kind of future will they choose? We are surely beyond the stage when any truly conscientious author can answer that question simply by saying: "But he would think of something..."

(Brian Stableford)

## Fashionably Green Ken Brown

**D**awn for a Distant Earth by L.E. Modesitt (Volume 1 of "The Forever Hero"; Tor, \$3.99), is a traditionally flashy and fashionably green space opera in which a future galactic empire tries to rehabilitate an Earth which has been almost uninhabited for some centuries after a not very well understood ecological disaster. Our hero is a native, a "devilkid," cast out

of the community because of some genetic tampering which gives him long life and fast reactions, and recruited into the "Imperial Interstellar Survey" by explorers. Naturally he goes into officer school, has a brief but glorious career in space and ends up back on Earth, trying to clean up.

Just in passing, why do many American writers have this thing about military training making a man of you? After you've read the *Brutalizing Basic Training* chapter, or the *Misunderstood but Noble Officer Cadet* versus the *Honour System* chapter, or the *Grumpy NCO with a Heart of Gold* chapter for the thirtieth or fortieth time you tend to skip those pages. And don't tell me it's the Vietnam experience: these things have been coming out since at least the 1930s. Perhaps it's because they don't really have a military tradition.

The novel is reasonably well done, but in the end there is nothing very original or interesting to say about it. It's not actually a bad book, just not quite good enough to grab the imagination and leave it grabbed when you've finished. There is refreshingly little violence apart from some off-stage space operatics, and the plot is driven by the conflict between the protagonist, bureaucracy and the thoroughly wasted environment of Earth. At the end of the book we realize that the protagonist doesn't seem to be aging; he discovers that he has grandchildren he has never met; we still have no explanation for the dire warnings found in an ancient fortress engraved on imperishable stone by a technique unknown to science (honest) and our hero is departing on a spaceship for parts unknown.

I really wanted to like *The Solar Wind* by Eric Tsang (Book Guild, £12.95). After all it's pleasingly short, written by a Hong Kong author (I don't see a lot of them outside textbooks on data management) and it's published near Brighton. I didn't manage to. I tried to read it as the work of a genuine naive genius, or possibly a stylishly stilted piece of sf mannerism (as in some of the more blatant passages of Jack Vance), but frankly, it's a turkey. To allow you to make up your own minds I shall quote the final paragraph of the book:

"Briefly speaking, we concluded that the signal is coming from Andromeda Galaxy and will reach us within four years if it keeps on moving at such an extra high speed. Moreover, the message itself is probably a certain kind of distress signal. It is a request for help!"

The case rests milord. It was the barbarian warlord and the mad scientist wot dunnit.

The mad scientists and would-be

warlords must take some of the blame for **The White Mountain**, the third volume of David Wingrove's "Chung Kuo" series (NEL, £15.99). It goes without saying that Wingrove has a better command of the English language than Eric Tsang, and a vastly greater facility for avoiding the clichés of sf, and there is something fundamentally interesting in his depiction of a Sinified future. However, for this reader, the work lacks a vital spark.

In essence this is that old sf chestnut about the State suppressing scientific progress in order to preserve itself. 23rd-century Earth has become entirely absorbed within China and is subjected to the arbitrary (but on the whole benevolent) rule of the seven T'angs. They govern through a mixture of absolutist laws, vicious repression, family loyalty and cod Confucianism, and their main fear is change. By the start of *The White Mountain* things are beginning to fall apart. Dissent and disorder are spreading among the common people, and plots laid in previous volumes are beginning to hatch. Everybody is conspiring against everyone else and the action consists of a long series of kidnappings, assassinations, raids, poisonings, betrayals, atrocities and tortures, padded out with psychological encounters reminiscent of some of the crasser writings of Frank Herbert.

Again, this is by no means a bad book. But it is very, very long, frequently repetitive and occasionally silly. I must admit I had more fun with the turkey.

**A Gift Upon the Shore** by M.K. Wren (Roc, £4.99) is billed as "a mythic story of survival." It is in fact an after-the-bomb story. I thought they weren't writing these any more, now that the New World Order has supposedly made the world safe for Truth, Justice and the American Way – but I'm glad someone is. Mary and Rachel, a writer and an artist, are living in a remote rural community in an America falling apart through civil disorder and plague when the Day comes. The only warning they get is that their digital watches stop. They lock themselves in their basement for a few weeks and emerge to icy desolation.

The only other significant set of survivors in the area are members of an evangelical Christian commune, the Ark. The younger woman falls in love with one of the men and joins the commune, leaving the other behind with her art, her livestock and her library. The main thrust of the narrative is the rather bluntly drawn contrast between the liberal intellectuals of Mary and Rachel, who are attempting to preserve as much as they can of art and literature through the new dark age, and the fixed perceptions of the "Arkites," for whom representative art is idolatry

and the only books permitted are works of practical use and the Bible – as interpreted by their sect.

This is quiet, thoughtful and worth reading. There is no hint of the *Cosy Catastrophe* here: forty years after the Day most of the characters are dead, the population is still falling, we still aren't sure whether the community will survive, but there is a glimmer of hope. A three-handkerchief novel.

**A**nd on to the fantasy. **White Jenna** by Jane Yolen (Tor, \$3.99), a sequel to *Sister Light, Sister Dark*, is a straightforward fantasy plot: girl meets boy – prophecy – quest – visit the Folk in the Hills – collect plot tokens – win the war because your strength is as the strength of ten (because your heart is pure) – girl gets boy. It is set in a world that is an awful lot like an idealized, feminized, Hollywoodized medieval England.

The Hames are communities of warrior women living near the Dales, whose sturdy folk are ruled by a load of patriarchal Robber Barons from the Continent who are essentially the Sheriff of Nottingham from all the Robin Hood films you ever saw. However the narrative style is far from straightforward, alternating "story" with "myth," "legend," and "history," the last-named being comic relief in the form of scholarly discussions of the period, written centuries after the action and (of course) getting things exactly wrong. There are also ballads, folksongs and large chunks of prophecy.

I found it hard to get into, but once past the first couple of chapters I was gripped. The prophecy is used by the characters to drive the story, rather than being used by the story to drive the characters. As we are repeatedly reminded by a 12-year-old priestess with a gift for making the stuff up on the spot, prophecy "must be read on the slant." In other words, use the prophecy to fool the rabble into thinking that whatever just happened was pre-ordained. I wish she wasn't called Petra though – to any Brit of my generation that is the name of the Blue Peter dog. Might as well call a man Fido or Butch. And while we're on names, do the King's three sons (guess which one inherits) have to be called Corum, Jorum and Gorum? Or was it Carum, Jarum and Garum? And I could do without the naff folksongs, complete with tunes. But if you can overlook those flaws, this is a gem.

**The School** by T.M. Wright (Gollancz, £3.99) is supposed to be a horror story. You can tell by the cover – a black background, the author's name in large, unfriendly metallic letters, a small and gruesome picture, the title below that (in large metallic letters) and a quote from someone or

other telling you how horrible it all is. In this case the someone is Dean R. Koontz whose books (in the UK at any rate) are sold in covers exactly like this one. That's the most interesting thing I can say about the novel, a long-winded story of a couple who, after the death of their young son unaccountably decide to inhabit a derelict school building in the middle of nowhere which has been abandoned by the local community ever since a number of the students died violently in mysterious circumstances. The school is, it turns out, one of those places where the world of the living overlaps with that of the dead...

The writing is impenetrable. Some passages had to be read three times before I realized what was happening. If I wasn't reviewing it I'd have given up around page 50.

Chaz Brenchley's **The Garden** (Coronet, £4.50) and **Mall Time** (Hodder & Stoughton, £14.99) are also packaged as horror (the cover of *The Garden* is almost identical to that of *The School*). They have no sf or fantasy content (other than the abnormal psychology of the villains) and don't really fall within IZ's province. They could as easily be placed as thrillers, or in some new category of "serial killer" books or (kiss of death for booksellers) simply as novels.

*Mall Time* is the pacier and (I'd guess) the more likely to be popular, following the wake of one of those men who for some reason grabs a gun and tries to kill as many people as possible (in this case in a shopping mall in Newcastle). *The Garden* is also a serial killer book, unusual in that it follows the points of view of the bereaved, who meet through a victim support group. There is some gruesome violence a little (gay) sex and a lot of character. I'm not sure I exactly like either book (I still have serious doubts about detailed depiction of murder as a fit subject for entertainment) but both are gripping, both describe more-or-less believable characters, and at least there is a sense of the loss and tragedy of death, something totally lacking in Wright's *The School* despite it's subject. If either book has a moral it seems to be that social workers, gays, beggars, students, unemployed single mothers, widows, television cameramen, radio announcers and nurses are the good guys (or at any rate harmless) but joining the army really screws you up.

**Which** brings us, somehow, to **Dream Baby** by Bruce McAllister (Tor, \$4.99). It is sold as "a novel of Vietnam" rather than as sf, and it is, in essence, the classic war story in which a group of Chaz Brenchley characters (the nice ones, the normal ones and the serial killers) go to war and come back changed. In this instance they become involved in a project intended to

exploit unusual mental powers which about one percent are supposed to develop under extreme stress—the sort of stress you get when people are dying all around you. Our small team is sent on various brutal and suicidally dangerous missions intended to stretch them to the limit to see how far their powers go, culminating in a desperate quest through Laos and North Vietnam (much of the action takes place at Dien Bien Phu) in order to sabotage the irrigation and flood control systems around Hanoi.

I have two problems with this book. There is a purely technical one with the underlying science-fiction idea: if it was at all likely that people could develop significant powers of telepathy, telekinesis, time-slow, clairvoyance and so on, and if these were at all useful in preserving life, we would have done so before now. The reproductive advantage of being somewhere else when the sabre-tooth tiger decides to attack would surely have made us all clairvoyant long ago. I also have a literary problem with the ending. The novel closes with some of the telepathic characters participating in a conglomerate personality that can see into, and choose between, various alternative futures. McAllister's writing cannot quite cope with the complexity, leaving this reader somewhat confused.

That said, the book is an excellent vehicle for what the author has to say and is easily the most powerful, as well as genuinely disturbing, of all the books I've read this time round. If nothing else, it made me realize how little I knew of the Vietnam war, my ideas mostly being formed from TV news coverage dimly remembered from childhood. For at least a week after reading it I was off sf and fantasy, devouring everything I could find on the war, and boring my friends and colleagues with its atrocities and absurdities.

(Ken Brown)

## Out of the Stone Age

### Chris Gilmore

How close can science fiction get to the mainstream without becoming part of it? Certainly no closer than *Orphan of Creation* by Roger MacBride Allen (Orbit, £4.50), which is set firmly in the present, and would be a mainstream novel except for the central idea, which is not particularly startling. If another critic wanted to claim it for the mainstream, I'd not be disposed to argue; taxonomies blur at the borders, which is what the book is about.

Allen postulates (not very convincingly, but let it pass) that a small colony

of australopithecines has survived into the present, and is maintained as a slave race by a tribe in up-country Gabon. Just prior to the Civil War there had been an abortive attempt to establish a few as plantation slaves in Mississippi. This having failed, they have been forgotten until Barbara Marchando, a black paleoanthropologist, discovers in short order references to them, their skeletons and the current generation.

The first half of the book is a meticulous novel of process, describing how the dig is undertaken, the attempts to keep it secret, how those attempts are thwarted and the reactions of various interested parties when the story breaks. It's slow-moving, but never loses interest – the reward of careful visualization and meticulous research, though the book's "mainstream" aspects are a lot less enthralling. They have to do mainly with Barbara's thoughts about the institution of slavery (worthy but predictable) and her relationships with her husband (intellectually brilliant but otherwise a self-pitying and manipulative mother's boy) and her great aunt, a cliché matriarch, so chockful of good humour and good sense that no inner life ascribed to her could be even faintly credible.

In the second half, when Marchando acquires a female specimen which she names Thursday and brings back to America, the book's sf credentials become apparent. It's very much a novel of ideas, and the ideas are highly moralistic. The australopithecines are too intelligent to be classed as animals, but not sufficiently so to take a place in Western society. On the other hand, they are capable of simple (boring? dirty? dangerous?) work, their reactions to toxins and diseases are identical – the possibilities are endless, and to Barbara, who feels responsible for them all, hateful. How are their rights to be safeguarded? What, in any case, should their rights be? Barbara sets about safeguarding them in an interesting manner which I won't disclose, but which inevitably leaves far more questions open than resolved.

No one knows for certain what australopithecines were really capable of, so Allen can be said to have manipulated the data for the sake of the story. But he doesn't go beyond the credible, and the questions he raises are certainly going to be important within a century. The mapping of the human genome proceeds apace, which means the mapping of the chimpanzee genome no less – the two diverge by less than 1 per cent. When we come to start serious work on the radical enhancement of mankind (and this one is when, not if), chimps will be the most obvious animal subject for the final experiments (unless we've extinguished the species with habitat

destruction and AIDS research beforehand). The by-product will surely be a variety of superchimps, at first not unlike Thursday and shortly surpassing her. Will we treat them with the mutually beneficial fair-mindedness hoped for by David Brin, or the corrupting cruelty feared by Cordwainer Smith? In either case, how will it turn out? Allen knows the answer no better than I, but he has put the question in a serious, thought-provoking fashion.

Do you remember when detractors of sf were accused of saying "that can't be sf – it's good"? I think on second thoughts I will take up the challenge of my hypothetical rival reviewer. This book is good because it isn't mainstream.

(Chris Gilmore)

## Twin Horrors

### Jones and McIntosh

Two "best of" collections, one from each side of the Atlantic, both big, and both showcasing stories from the fantasy and horror field. They are, respectively, *Best New Horror 2* (Robinson, £7.99) edited by Stephen Jones and Ramsey Campbell, and *The Year's Best Fantasy and Horror, Fourth Annual Collection* (St Martin's Press, \$27.95) edited by Ellen Datlow and Terry Windling. All but the most gluttonous of fantasy and horror aficionados might balk at the cost of buying both these books, so – at the risk of ruining the suspense, let's say right now that, as far as we're concerned, the Jones & Campbell book is the better read. Why? Well, first and foremost, we rated more of the stories they'd selected than those in the Datlow & Windling book – but also because their collection has a sense of identity and purpose which the Datlow & Windling collection lacks. The two titles themselves give a fairly heavy hint as to why that is: Jones & Campbell have targeted horror (and placed most of their darts in or around the bullseye) while Datlow & Windling have stretched their collection to include fantasy too, which is a harder label to pin down.

Best Horror's cover art shows a fanged, gore-dripping ghoul peering through the slats of a venetian blind. Fortunately the collection features very few gore-dripping ghouls and absolutely no venetian blinds. Instead it contains a selection of largely very effective dark fantasies which lean heavily towards the psychological rather than the gore-and-claw side of horror fiction. It's a style perfectly exemplified by the opening story, K.W. Jeter's "The First Time" (one of only four stories to feature in both collec-

tions), a dark allegory of adolescent sexual awakening and lost innocence which is also brutally well written, laid out with razor-sharp images which truly invoke a sense of horror in the reader. It's vital to kick off any anthology with a really strong story and the Jeter does that emphatically. (The Datlow/Windling doesn't, incidentally, but more of that later).

British writers are in a minority, but they do nonetheless provide some of the strongest work in what is already a strong collection. Deservedly reprinted from *Interzone* is Kim Newman's fine "The Original Dr Shade," whilst Ian MacLeod's "172nd Scale" uses the trauma of adolescence to telling effect in a painstakingly observed story that keeps the reader absorbed throughout.

Thomas Ligotti is almost a brand-name writer these days, and he's represented with "The Last Feast of Harlequin," where it's not the plot that's important but the brooding, almost surrealist atmospherics of the writing. Other highlights include Karl Edward Wagner's elegiac "Cedar Lane," the slow-building paranoia of Kim Antieau's "At a Window Facing West," and the neat something-nasty-in-toyland tale from Gahan Wilson, "Mister Ice Cool." Altogether you get no less than 28 stories here, from the likes of Cherry Wilder, Poppy Z. Brite, Harlan Ellison and Jonathan Carroll, and most, if not quite all, genuinely belong in a best-of. So, the collection scores high on the value-for-money scale for anyone who has a taste for the genre.

It's somewhat harder work to mine the gems from the Datlow & Windling, partly because, as we said, the book lacks the clarity of focus of the Jones & Campbell. Yes, there's that rather unwieldy title to live up to: the year's best fantasy and horror. Now these are supposed to be the days of something going by the name of the metagenre, in which sf and fantasy and horror have supposedly become all one big field (with crime perhaps lapping at the shoreline, too...). Admittedly there's a lot of overlap these days, and some of the most interesting stories could fit into more than one of those categories. But...although Datlow & Windling don't attempt to cram sf in, but what they have got is still some sweep of field, metagenre or no metagenre. And some of the fantasy stories in particular seem almost as if they've been chosen more for the particular sub-genre they represent than their innate quality. For example the competent but otherwise disappointing opening story, "Freewheeling" by Charles de Lint, which features a misunderstood kid and a lot of (literally) freewheeling bicycles – but it doesn't pull anywhere near strongly enough to head the collection. Other notable dis-

appointments include Gary Kilworth's paper-thin anecdote "Truman Capote's Tribble: The Facts" and Angela Carter's tediously unwary re-working of the Cinderella story, "Ashputtle, or The Mother's Ghost."

In a book this big there are bound to be some strong stories – and, to be fair, there are many. David Schow's "Not from Round Here" may or may not fit the "splatterpunk" tag but it is undoubtedly a story of some accomplishment, one of the strongest in the collection. Also here is Michael Blumlein, with the appropriately titled, "Bestseller," a shrewdly judged piece about a hard-up writer who decides to earn a little money by selling his body – piece by piece. Plus there's the standout Lucius Shepard and Robert Frazier collaboration, "The All Consuming," (mutant rain-forests etc.) which was also selected for the Dozois Year's Best SF anthology and is a genuine metagenre story, easily at home in both collections. Another strong story is Joe R. Lansdale's "The Phone Woman," which achieves its unsettling effect by getting the reader first to empathize with the ordinary guy-next-door... and then read on. Amongst the other featured writers here you'll find Jonathan Carroll (with two stories, one of them from *Interzone*), Michael Bishop, Karen Joy Fowler, Jack Womack, Nancy A. Collins and Sharon M. Hall (with her *Interzone* story, "The Last Game").

There are just four stories you'd also find in the Jones & Campbell – the superb K.W. Jeter and the Thomas Ligotti already mentioned above; "A Short Guide to the City" by Peter Straub, undoubtedly clever in straight literary terms perhaps but also fairly uninviting; and "Stephen" by Elizabeth Massie, a strong and moving account of terribly damaged people, some hurt in the body, some in the mind.

Most of the above come out of the horror stable (at least they'd seem at home in the Jones & Campbell book) although there are also some worthwhile stories in the fantasy category. For instance, there's John Morressy's "Timekeeper," a nostalgic trip to New England which has considerable charm; and then there's that Ian MacLeod fellow popping up again with "Green," an offbeat tale all about a gardener's life in a very rum garden. In "Moths," John Brunner recreates the feel of 18th-century France with unerring skill, and "Missolonghi 1824" finds John Crowley doing much the same with a fictionalized account of an episode at the end of Lord Byron's life in Greece.

But, by and large, it's the horror stories in this collection that work best for us, perhaps because the fantasy Datlow and Windling have selected just isn't the sort that appeals to us. A

lot of the selections centred, as Windling's introduction admitted, on "family and childhood themes" – too many for us, sandwiched together as they are here. Surprisingly though, at least for a collection that claims the year's best tag for fantasy, there's nothing that resembles what a lot of readers who buy "Fantasy" by the wheelbarrowful understand by the term – sword & sorcery, of the Leiber/Moorcock variety. The introduction says that's because it's just not up to standard. But perhaps it's because it's not to Datlow & Windling's tastes. Surely there were one or two stories of that particular denomination that were worth including, even if only to provide some balance and variety?

The Year's Best Fantasy & Horror weighs in at nearly 550 pages and features not far off fifty stories (plus a handful of pages of poetry), but too many of them are stories that left us (while admiring the literary paintwork) rather relieved to have got to the last line. It's quality stuff, no question, but, although its focus is admittedly narrower, *Best New Horror 2* is the collection we'd recommend if you have to make a choice.

Finally, at a time when new sf & fantasy magazines and anthologies seem to come and go with the regularity of London cabs, it's nice to be able to report back on one which seems to have found its niche and intends to stay in it. Issues 6 & 7 of *Fantasy Tales* edited by Stephen Jones and David Sutton (Robinson) find the twice-yearly anthology/magazine in apparently sound health. With the demise of *Fear*, it is now one of the very few remaining professional publishers of short horror fiction this side of the Atlantic. The stories range from the pretty good (Thomas Ligotti has a story in each issue) to the pretty dire (Samantha Lee's "Jelly Roll Blues" is, we kid you not, a weak dirty joke painfully stretched out to story length). Ramsey Campbell features in both issues, with stories in a sword and sorcery series, plus there's Adrian Cole, Neil Gaiman, Kathryn Ptacek, Clive Barker and – certainly familiar to *IZ* readers – Kim Newman and Garry Kilworth.

Taking its cue from the spirit of 1940s and 50s pulp fiction, *FT* originally projected a cheap and cheerful image. The relaunched magazine, aiming for bookshop distribution, has gone for a blander style, with a run of J.K. Potter covers fronting rather greyish print on low-quality paper spiced up with some indifferent interior artwork. With issue 7, however, the cover price has taken a relatively steep hike from £2.95 to £3.99. For that sort of outlay the reader may well begin to expect rather more from the magazine, and it may need some sort of facelift if it's

going to retain its audience. If so, let's hope it gets it. *Fantasy Tales* has been around for a considerable while now. Just for that staying power alone, it deserves continued success.

(Neil Jones & Neil McIntosh)

## Real Sophisticated Adult Graphic Novels

Andy Robertson

Graphic novels have been the coming thing for several years now. Since Frank Miller's *The Dark Knight Returns*, critics have hoped for a breakthrough in popular recognition of the medium, but it has stubbornly refused to arrive. This is the more surprising because most of the rest of Europe has enjoyed real graphic novels for a generation. On the continent the bandes dessinées have a market whose volume and age-profile is comparable with the paperback book. The medium has produced writers and artists like Mobius/Giraud, Schuiten, Liberatore, Caza, Bilal and Drulillet, and magazines like *Métal Hurlant* and *Pilote*. BD's are reviewed in quality papers and, more to the point, they deserve to be; but in the UK and America the graphic novel (or "comic") as everyone actually calls it has never gained popular and critical recognition.

This is the result of an historical accident: the rise of the superhero genre, which is what narrative panel art means to most British and American readers today. Despite the continuing production of good work outside the straitjacket (from *Little Nemo in Slumberland* thru *Prince Valiant* thru *Eagle* right down to *2000 AD*) Superman and his bloated brood dominate the UK/USA panel-art scene. Sales of graphic novels have only confirmed this; apart from the brilliant *Maus*, only *Watchmen* and *The Dark Knight Returns* made any real impact, and while they have arguably introduced the concept of "adult" panel art to a wide audience they failed to take more than half a step sideways from the Superhero. *The Dark Knight* was excellent; *Watchmen* was brilliant; but a scad of more radical but almost equally good stuff has had almost no impact outside the cognoscenti. *Stray Toasters* or *Heartbreak Soup*, anyone?

The efforts of the most talented writers and artists have failed to shift public tastes. People like Frank Miller, Alan Moore and Bill Sienkiewicz have tried to say goodbye to the superhero, but still he soars boldly on, dragging the whole medium after him. Which is blatantly absurd. Panel art is arguably well suited to fantasy/sf themes, but



there is no reason at all why it should be uniquely associated with costumed idiots who can fly. The possibilities of the medium are enormous, but, over here, they remain almost unexploited.

Enough of this. Now we have to review the first two in a new line of graphic novels from that most august of British publishers, Gollancz. This is a brave move for Gollancz, always friends of the sf reader (VG-on-a-yellow-spine = sf, as far as I knew at fourteen) and perhaps this will mark the start of the recognition of real panel art in the English-speaking world. But I have to say that I doubt it. These books are interesting and worthy, but I'm afraid they are both at least partly failures.

**F**irst *The Luck in the Head* (Gollancz, £8.99), illustrated by Ian Miller and written by M. John Harrison. This is an adaptation of Harrison's original story, one of his elliptic Viriconium cycle. Miller chooses a semi-realistic style, projecting a darkly chaotic medieval Viriconium like something out of Gormenghast. This is in some ways difficult to swallow – for me, it doesn't really fit with Harrison's protean *Last City* – but that's arguably a problem of taste. More serious is Miller's refusal to grant Viriconium any geographical or social logic and coherence: this may be true to his reading of Harrison's text, but it doesn't work as panel

art, because it makes it impossible for the reader to create any kind of mental theatre, any sort of projected fantasy environment, which is the necessary preliminary to telling the story.

Even in the first few pages, it is obvious that Miller has not given sufficient regard to the fundamental rules of panel art. The picture-narrative should be primary, and the text-narrative secondary. The words are there to reinforce, complement, or in some cases contradict the images, not to carry the story along by themselves. To put it bluntly, you must be able to tell what is going on by looking at the pictures, without reading the words. Awfully juvenile, I know, but necessary. There is also a secondary consideration, which is very important in fantasy/sf panel art: in the interests of the reader's understanding, the more fantastic the situation of a panel, the more realistic the treatment should be. Sienkiewicz, to take one very influential example, can get away with distorted physiques, symbolic grotesques, cartoon figures, multiple artistic styles, and multiple parallel visual subtexts; but he nearly always does this in a familiar environment, in ordinary rooms, streets, or vehicles, and he builds on the foundation of an almost photographic accuracy in most of his figures and backgrounds. Miller has a slight case of Sienkiewicz-itis, and he tries to use these tricks in the wrong place, confusing the real and the symbolic, not to mention confusing the reader.

For instance, when we get a character (Ardwick Crome) split up into himself and three imaginary totem-figures (a bird-man, a doll-man, and a tree-man) that's fine just so long as these figures are obviously not real. But transfer this to a city where people wear the heads of beasts in reality, let the woman with the insect mask actually enter the room, and you have a mess. Indeed, though the individual pictures are often very good, this book is sadly confusing. There is little idea of how to make panel art work: of the correct visual pacing, the way to focus on a scenario and filter in the background through details, of when visual ambiguity can be used and when it should be rigorously avoided, and of how to compose a page as a narrative unit. Miller can be a superb artist, and Harrison is a superb writer, but a graphic novel requires a different set of skills. (Paradoxically, though, there is one sequence in the book that works very well indeed – the one unambiguously unreal sequence: Crome's dream).

There are other and more minor nigglings. The lettering is arty but needlessly hard to read; too much reliance is placed on enormous blocks of text to carry the plot; the old weapon Crome is given, obviously a power blade (i.e. an immaterial line of light



and cutting force issuing from a handle) is drawn as a ridiculous toy sword; Ian Miller has not been let loose on the Great Brown Waste, something I was looking forward to; and please, please, do tell me that was not La Thatch sitting in Mammy Vooly's chair?

**A**lan Moore and Oscar Zarate's *A Small Killing* (Gollancz, £8.99) is also a bit of a disappointment, but it can't really be called a failure in anything like the same way. It is a moral tale of the yuppie-redeemed-from-Capitalism-to-his-true-self variety, and it works, but I'm afraid it's just not very interesting. Timothy Holve may indeed deserve to be redeemed, but not all the best scripting and writing of the very talented Alan Moore can make this story of an ordinary human crisis anything other than worthy and dull. I think the hardcore comic fan will buy this on the strength of Moore's name, and probably enjoy it a certain amount (as I did), but I'm afraid the punters will dismiss it as rubbish. Oscar Zarate provides energetic and vivid, but sometimes rather thuddingly naïf, artwork.

I've got an awful feeling that Moore is going down that old now-I've-grown-up-I-don't-want-to-play-sf-any-more path, and I pray it isn't so. Agreed, panel art has to shake off the Superhero incubus, but we should not throw out the bathwater with the (costumed, flying) baby. Panel art and sf/fantasy go together naturally: this is a very distracting medium, a very visual medium, and one where the SFX cost nothing. And it is a medium no worse, but no better, suited than, say, television, to that detailed internal narrative of thought, emotion and ideas which is the province of the mainstream novel.

Nice try, Gollancz. I applaud the idea of publishing a line of Real Sophisticated Adult Graphic Novels; but it looks as though you should first have obtained the advice of someone who actually understands Those Awful Crude Adolescent Comics. Better luck in future.

(Andy Robertson)

## UK Books Received November 1991

The following is a list of all sf, fantasy and horror titles, and books of related interest, received by Interzone during the month specified above. Official publication dates, where known, are given in *italics* at the end of each entry. Descriptive phrases in quotes following titles are taken from book covers rather than title pages. A listing here does not preclude a separate review in this issue (or in a future issue) of the magazine.

Anthony, Piers, and Robert E. Margroff. *Serpent's Silver*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21246-9, 313pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel,

first published in the USA, 1988; sequel to *Dragon's Gold*.) 21st November.

Asprin, Robert. *Phule's Company*. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-992370-X, 232pp, paperback, £3.99. (Humorous sf novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 52.) 2nd January 1992.

Barker, Clive. *Clive Barker's Books of Blood*. Volumes I, II and III. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-20229-1, 20230-5 and 20231-3, 213, 215 and 248pp, hardcover, £13.95 each. (Horror collections, first published in 1984.) 5th December.

Bradbury, Ray. *The Day It Rained Forever*. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015246-6, 233pp, paperback, £4.50. (Sf/fantasy collection, first published in 1959; 12th Penguin printing; it bears some relation to the American volume *A Medicine for Melancholy*, first published in the same year, but has widely differing contents; perhaps the best story here, "And the Rock Cried Out," was reprinted for years in the U.S. edition of Bradbury's short novel *Fahrenheit 451* (1953), although it never appeared therein in this country.) 28th November.

Bradbury, Ray. *A Graveyard for Lunatics: Another Tale of Two Cities*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21126-8, 285pp, paperback, £3.99. (Crime/fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; we've been so used to thinking of Bradbury as a short-story writer only that it comes as a surprise to realize that this is his second new full-length novel within the space of a few years.) 5th December.

Brust, Steven. *Brokedown Palace*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-30793-2, 270pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1986; Brust's full name is Steven Karl Zoltan Brust, and he seems to be importing a certain Hungarian influence into American fantasy.) 8th November.

Cadigan, Pat. *Patterns*. Introduction by Bruce Sterling. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21148-9, 299pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf collection, first published in the USA, 1989.) 5th December.

Chalker, Jack L. *Masters of Flux & Anchor: Soul Rider, Book Three*. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-012316-4, 429pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1985.) December?

Charrette, Robert N. *Find Your Own Truth: Secrets of Power, Volume 3*. "Shadowrun." Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015241-5, 329pp, paperback, £4.50. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) December?

Crichton, Michael. *Jurassic Park*. "In the future there will be dinosaurs." Arrow, ISBN 0-09-988700-2, 400pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 50.) 2nd January 1992.

Cornell, Paul. *Timewyrm: Revelation*. "The New Doctor Who Adventures." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20360-7, 220pp, paperback, £3.50. (Shared-universe juvenile sf novel, first edition; fourth and last in the "Timewyrm" series.) 12th December.

Datlow, Ellen, ed. *Alien Sex: 19 Tales by the Masters of Science Fiction and Dark Fantasy*. Foreword by William Gibson. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21178-0, 333pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1990; it contains a mixture of new and reprinted stories on a sexual theme, including work by Edward Bryant, Harlan Ellison, Philip José Farmer, Larry Niven, Geoff Ryman, James Tiptree Jr, Lisa Tuttle and Connie Willis; reviewed by Paul Brazier in *Interzone* 46.) 21st November.

Gilluly, Sheila. *The Boy from the Burren: The First Book of the Painter*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3713-1, 343pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 50.) 14th November.

Greenberg, Martin H., ed. *After the King: Stories in Honour of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Introduction by Jane Yolen. Pan, ISBN 0-330-32027-0, 534pp, hardcover, £15.99. (Fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; proof copy received; contains original tales by Poul & Karen Anderson, Peter S. Beagle, Gregory Benford, John Brunner, Charles de Lint, Stephen R. Donaldson, Patricia A. McKillip, Barry Malzberg, Andre Norton, Terry Pratchett, Mike Resnick, Robert Silverberg and others.) 10th January 1992.

Harris, Steve. *Wulf*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3678-X, 595pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 50.) 12th December.

Hutson, Shaun. *Renegades*. Sphere, ISBN 0-7474-0791-6, 434pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror novel, first published in 1991.) 5th December.

Jeter, K.W. *Dark Seeker*. Pan, ISBN 0-330-31680-X, 317pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf/horror novel, first published in the USA, 1987.) 6th December.

Kaye, Marvin, with Saralee Kaye, eds. *Mas-terpieces of Terror and the Supernatural: A Treasury of Spellbinding Tales Old & New*. Macdonald, ISBN 0-356-20221-6, 658pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror/fantasy anthology, first published in the USA, 1985; it contains an impressive line-up of stories by Leonid Andreyev, Stephen Crane, Guy de Maupassant, J.W. Goethe, Jack London, Ogden Nash, Damon Runyon, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Robert Louis Stevenson, Lord Tennyson, Dylan Thomas, Ivan Turgenev, Walt Whitman, Tennessee Williams and others, including most of the genre's standard authors from Poe to Bloch, plus fairly short but interesting introduction, afterword and notes by Kaye.) 5th December.

Keegan, Mel. *Death's Head*. Gay Men's Press, ISBN 0-85449-162-7, 349pp, trade paperback, £6.95. (Sf novel, first edition; it's a 23rd-century thriller about designer drugs, with a homosexual theme; the author is Australian, and this appears to be his first venture in the sf field.) 21st November.

Kennedy, Patricia. *The Silver Branch: A Book of The Keltiad*. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21248-5, 555pp, paperback, £4.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1988; the author blurbs tells us that Ms Kennedy was once married to Jim Morrison of The Doors.) 5th December.

Koontz, Dean R. *The Door to December*. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-0436-5, 312pp, hardcover, £14.95. (Horror/suspense novel, first published in the USA, 1985; it originally appeared under the pseudonym "Leigh Nichols.") 7th November.

Le Guin, Ursula K. *A Wizard of Earthsea*. "Volume One of the magical Earthsea books." Drawings by Ruth Robbins. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015776-X, 203pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1968; it was originally published as a juvenile, but now seems to be accepted as an adult book; Naomi Lewis is quoted on the cover as saying that it's "one of the major works of fantasy in this century.") 28th November.

Lucas, Penelope. *Wilderness Moon*. "In the great tradition of *Clan of the Cave Bear*." Corgi, ISBN 0-552-13647-6, 480pp, paperback, £4.99. (Prehistoric fantasy novel, first published in 1991.) 16th January 1992.

Lumley, Brian. **Sorcery in Shad: Tales of the Primal Land, Volume Three**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3634-8, 246pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first edition; it appears to be Lovecraftian "Cthulhu mythos" material rewritten in the style of Edgar Rice Burroughs's Barsoom books with perhaps a dash of Jack Vance's Dying Earth thrown in.) 12th December.

Mann, Phillip. **Wulfsyarn: A Mosaic**. Gollancz/VG&F, ISBN 0-575-05162-0, 287pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1990; reviewed by Gwyneth Jones in *Interzone* 45.) 5th December.

Marsh, Ian, and Peter Davrell-Evans. **Time Lord**. "Doctor Who. Create your own adventures in time and space." Virgin/Doctor Who, ISBN 0-426-20362-3, 287pp, trade paperback, £6.99. (Sf role-playing game book based on the "Doctor Who" TV series; first edition.) 12th December.

Masterton, Graham. **Black Angel**. Mandarin, ISBN 0-7493-0963-6, 312pp, paperback, £3.99. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 1991; Masterton is bewilderingly prolific; his books tend to be published in America first, and it may be that this is an old title; British [Scottish, actually] and a former editor of *Mayfair* magazine, he writes horrific historical sagas as well as horror novels; his over-the-top gross-out story "Eric the Pie" recently got the short-lived *Newsfield* magazine *Frighteners* banned by W.H. Smith, which was allegedly a contributory factor to *Newsfield's* bankruptcy.) 5th December.

Moorcock, Michael. **The Revenge of the Rose: A Tale of the Albino Prince in the Years of His Wandering**. "His new Elric Novel." Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21501-8, 233pp, trade paperback, £7.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1991; a pre-publication extract appeared in *Interzone* 46 as "Elric: A Dragon Wakes"; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 56.) 21st November.

Morrell, David. **The Totem**. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3687-9, 306pp, paperback, £4.50. (Horror novel, first published in the USA, 1979; this edition contains a new introduction by the author.) 12th December.

Nye, Robert. **The Life and Death of My Lord Gilles de Rais**. Sphere/Abacus, ISBN 0-349-10250-3, 324pp, paperback, £5.99. (Historical/horror novel, first published in 1990; it's based on the well-known and apparently true story of the ghastly child-murderer who was a friend of Joan of Arc; Robert Nye does not really belong to our field, but his earlier novels include such quasi-fantasy items as *Merlin* and *Faust*.) 14th November.

Pohl, Frederik. **Homegoing**. Gollancz/VG&F, ISBN 0-575-05161-2, 279pp, paperback, £3.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1989; reviewed by Ken Brown in *Interzone* 44.) 5th December.

Reeves-Stevens, Judith and Garfield. **The Chronicles of Galen Sword, Book 1: Shifter**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015956-8, 284pp, paperback, £4.50. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 28th November.

Royle, Nicholas, ed. **Darklands**. Foreword by Ramsey Campbell. Egerton Press [5 Windsor Court, Avenue Rd., London N15 5JQ], ISBN 0-9518520-0-0, 117pp, paperback, £2.95 plus 55p postage & packing. (Horror anthology, first edition; it contains all-new stories by Steven Gallagher, Joel Lane, Derek Marlowe, Mark Morris, Michael Marshall Smith and others; this is Nick Royle's first book, self-published [although he has refrained from including any of his own stories]; very reasonably priced, and quite handsomely produced, it deserves support.) 14th November.

Ryman, Geoff. Was. HarperCollins, ISBN 0-00-223931-0, 353pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Historical/fantasy novel, first edition; proof copy received; the title is a contraction of *The Wizard of Oz* [shades of John Boorman's film *Zardoz*], and this new Ryman opus looks to be something special; in the words of the blurb, "From the settling of the West, and the heyday of the Hollywood studios, to the glittering megalopolis of modern Los Angeles, *Was* is the story of all our childhoods, and of how America grew, like a child, from innocence to maturity.") 13th February 1992.

Salvatore, R.A. **Sojourn**. "Forgotten Realms Fantasy Adventure, Book Three, The Dark Elf Trilogy." Penguin, ISBN 0-14-014399-8, 309pp, paperback, £4.50. (Shared-world fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 12th December.

Scanziani, Piero. **The White Book**. Translated by Linda Lappin. Eureka Publishers [8 High St., Windsor, Berks. SL4 1LD], ISBN 1-873414-02-1, 307pp, hardcover, £14.99. (Philosophical fantasy novel, first published in Italy, 1968; winner of the Prix Veillon in 1969; the author is said to have been a finalist for the Nobel Prize and has won various other awards; according to the blurb, in the afterlife a group of recently dead are "called upon to defend Adam, the father of mankind, on trial for every human crime.") 26th November.

Silverberg, Robert. **The Face of the Waters**. Grafton, ISBN 0-586-21502-6, 348pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Sf novel, first published in 1991; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 51.) 5th December.

Slung, Michele, ed. **I Shudder at Your Touch: 22 Tales of Sex and Horror**. Penguin/Roc, ISBN 0-14-015967-3, 379pp, paperback, £4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in the USA, 1991; contains mainly reprint stories by Robert Aickman, Clive Barker, Michael Blumlein, Jonathan Carroll, Angela Carter, Thomas M. Disch, Stephen R. Donaldson, Christopher Fowler, Stephen King, Patrick McGrath, Ruth Rendell and others.) 28th November.

Steele, Allen. **Lunar Descent**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-929000-7, 381pp, paperback, £4.99. (Sf novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 2nd January 1992.

Sternbach, Rick, and Michael Okuda. **Star Trek: The Next Generation Technical Manual**. Introduction by Gene Roddenberry. Bantam, ISBN 1-852283-340-8, viii+184pp, trade paperback, £11.99. (Illustrated volume of imaginary spacecraft specifications, etc; first published in the USA, 1991.) 28th November.

Taylor, Keith. **Felimid's Homecoming**. Bard V. Headline, ISBN 0-7472-3740-9, 280pp, paperback, £3.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition.) 14th November.

Tem, Melanie. **Blood Moon**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-???-170pp, paperback, £???. (Horror novel, first published in the USA [?], 19??; proof copy received.) March 1992.

Thomas, Sue. **Correspondence**. Women's Press, ISBN 0-???-152pp, paperback, £???. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; a debut book by a new British writer.) April 1992.

Volsky, Paula. **Illusion**. Gollancz/VG&F, ISBN 0-575-05138-8, 700pp, trade paperback, £8.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991; there is a simultaneous hardcover edition [not seen].) 5th December.

Watson, Noelle, with Paul E. Schellinger, Elizabeth Nishiura and Karen P. Singson, eds. **Twentieth-Century Science-Fiction Writers**. 3rd edition. St James Press, ISBN 1-55862-111-3, xxiv+1,016pp, hardcover,

£75. (Bibliographical reference book, containing information on over 600 sf-and-fantasy authors; previous editions appeared in 1981 and 1986, both edited by Curtis C. Smith; see the review elsewhere in this issue of *IZ*.) November.

Weis, Margaret, and Tracy Hickman. **Fire Sea: The Death Gate Cycle, Volume 3**. Bantam, ISBN 0-593-02356-0, 364pp, hardcover, £13.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1991.) 5th December.

Whitfield, Stephen E., and Gene Roddenberry. **The Making of Star Trek: Titan**. ISBN 1-85286-363-3, 363pp, paperback, £5.99. (Illustrated history of the early years of the TV series; the first edition was published in the USA, 1968.) Late entry: September publication, received in November.

Williams, Tad. **Stone of Farewell: Book Two of Memory, Sorrow, and Thorn**. Arrow/Legend, ISBN 0-09-984810-4, 874pp, paperback, £5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in the USA, 1990.) 5th December.

Yntema, Sharon K., ed. **More Than 100 Women Science Fiction Writers**. Crossing Press [distributed in the UK by Airlift, 26/28 Eden Grove, London N7 6EF], ISBN 0-895594-449-9, 216pp, trade paperback, £9.95. (Annotated bibliography of female authors; first published in the USA, 1988; it says "updated edition" on the cover, though there's no mention of this fact on the reverse of the title page; digging deeper, we discover that there's a "1990 Supplement" filling pages 195-216.) No date given: received in November.

## Overseas Books Received

Anderson, Poul. **Explorations**. Tor, ISBN 0-8125-51536-6, 317pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Sf collection, first published in 1981.) November.

Ball, Margaret. **Flameweaver**. Baen, ISBN 0-671-72095-3, 374pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; the author also writes historical and romantic fiction under the name of Catherine Lyndell, and this is her second fantasy book; with its 19th-century Russian setting, it looks interesting.) December.

Bujold, Lois McMaster. **Barrayar**. Baen, ISBN 0-671-72083-X, 389pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Sf novel, first edition; it's the latest in her "Miles Vorkosigan" series; Bujold keeps winning Hugo awards, so she must have something going for her.) Late entry: October 1991 publication, received in November.

Campbell, Ramsey. **Waking Nightmares**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85250-9, 273pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror collection, first edition.) 18th November.

Card, Orson Scott. **The Memory of Earth: Homecoming, Volume 1**. Tor, ISBN 0-312-93036-4, 294pp, hardcover, \$20.95. (Sf novel, first edition; proof copy received; this is the start of another five-volume series by Card, set in the distant future.) March 1992.

Carroll, Jonathan. **Black Cocktail**. Illustrated by Dave McKean. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-06304-0, 76pp, hardcover, \$13.95. (Fantasy novella, first published in the UK, 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 44.) Late entry: 23rd September publication, received in November.

Dickson, Gordon R. **The Dragon Knight**. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50943-9, 503pp, paperback, \$5.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1990; sequel to *The Dragon* and the *George*; reviewed by Wendy Bradley in *Interzone* 50.) November.

Gorman, Ed, and Martin H. Greenberg, eds. **Solved.** "Wherein great mystery writers crack classic unsolved crimes." Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-689-9, 295pp, hardcover, \$21.95. (Crime-fiction anthology, first edition; there's an alternative-world tinge to this book in that all the stories involve bizarre solutions to real-life "cases" – the Kennedy assassination, the death of Marilyn Monroe, the Challenger disaster, etc; some of the authors are also familiar for their horror and fantasy, among them Rex Miller, Matthew J. Costello, Alan Dean Foster, Nancy A. Collins and Barry N. Malzberg.) November?

Harrison, Harry, and Bruce McAllister, eds. **There Won't Be War.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51941-8, 309pp, paperback, \$3.99. (SF anthology, first edition; it contains mainly original stories on an anti-war theme, including pieces by Isaac Asimov, Joe Haldeman, Marc Laidlaw, James Morrow, Frederik Pohl, Robert Schooley, Charles Stross and George Zebrowski; the few reprint stories include William Tenn's "The Liberation of Earth" (1953), J.G. Ballard's "The Terminal Beach" (1964) and Kim Stanley Robinson's "The Lucky Strike" (1984); the title of the anthology is of course a joke at the expense of Jerry Pournelle's *There Will Be War* series of militaristic sf anthologies.) November.

Hartwell, David G., ed. **The Medusa in the Shield: The Dark Descent, Vol. 2.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50966-8, 498pp, paperback, \$4.99. (Horror anthology, first published in 1987; originally part of a massive hardcover volume which is currently being republished as three paperbacks in both the USA and UK; this segment contains stories by Robert Aickman, Clive Barker, Ramsey Campbell, Thomas M. Disch, William Faulkner, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, Henry James, Stephen King, D.H. Lawrence, J. Sheridan Le Fanu, H.P. Lovecraft, Edgar Allan Poe, Joanna Russ, Theodore Sturgeon and others; recommended, obviously.) November.

Ing, Dean. **The Nemesis Mission.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-85105-7, 340pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Near-future techno-thriller, first edition.) 4th November.

James, Peter. **Sweet Heart.** St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-06477-2, 278pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (Horror novel, first published in the UK, 1990.) 18th December.

Knight, Damon. **A Reasonable World.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-50978-1, 272pp, paperback, \$3.99. (SF novel, first published in 1991; sequel to *CV* and *The Observers*.) November.

Kushner, Ellen. **Swordpoint: A Melodrama of Manners.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51771-7, 271pp, paperback, \$3.99. (Fantasy novel, first published in 1987; second Tor printing; reviewed by Paul J. McAuley in *Interzone* 24.) November.

Morris, Kenneth. **The Chalchiuhite Dragon: A Tale of Toltec Times.** Afterword and glossary by Douglas A. Anderson. Tor, ISBN 0-312-85284-9, 291pp, hardcover, \$19.95. (Fantasy novel based on Mexican mythology; first edition; proof copy received; the author, who was a leading Theosophist, and whose "Welsh" fantasy novels such as *Book of the Three Dragons* (1930) have been much praised by Ursula Le Guin, died in 1937.) March 1992.

Niven, Larry, with Donald Kingsbury, Greg Bear and S.M. Stirling. **Man-Kzin Wars IV.** Baen, ISBN 0-671-72079-1, 311pp, paperback, \$4.95. (Shared-universe sf anthology; first edition; it contains a brief introduction by Niven, a novel by Kingsbury (244 pages) and a novella written jointly by Bear and Stirling.) Late entry: September 1991 publication, received in November.

Pike, Christopher. **The Season of Passage.** Tor, ISBN 0-312-85115-4, 344pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (SF/horror novel, first edition; proof copy received; Pike seems to be in transition from the "young-adult" [where he is already a U.S. bestseller] to the adult-fiction category.) February 1992.

Roberts, John Maddox. **Conan the Rogue.** Tor, ISBN 0-812-51411-4, 304pp, trade paperback, \$7.99. (Fantasy novel, first edition; a new sequel by another hand to Robert E. Howard's "Conan" stories of the 1930s.) November.

Rusch, Kristine Kathryn, ed. **The Best of Pulphouse: The Hardback Magazine.** Foreword by Kate Wilhelm. St Martin's Press, ISBN 0-312-06564-7, 328pp, hardcover, \$22.95. (SF/fantasy anthology, first edition; contains 25 stories from the much-praised *Pulphouse*; oddly enough, two of the pieces ("Foresight" by Michael Swanwick and "Jamaica Vu" by Geoffrey A. Landis) first appeared in *Interzone*; among the other contributors are Alan Brennert, Edward Bryant, Nancy A. Collins, Charles de Lint, George Alec Effinger, Greg Egan, Harlan Ellison, Lisa Goldstein, Kathe Koja, Thomas F. Monteleone, Harry Turtledove, Lisa Tuttle and Jane Yolen.) Late entry: 20th September publication, received in November.

Thomas, Thomas T. ME: **A Novel of Self-Discovery.** Baen, ISBN 0-671-72073-2, 341pp, paperback, \$4.95. (SF novel, first edition; it's a computer-program-comes-alive story, described in the blurb as "a bildungsroman for software.") Late entry: August 1991 publication, received in November.

Twain, Mark. **A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.** Introduction and afterword by R.L. Fisher. Tor, ISBN 0-812-50436-4, 333pp, paperback, \$2.50. (Humorous fantasy novel, first published in 1889.) November.

Watson, Ion. **The Flies of Memory.** Carroll & Graf, ISBN 0-88184-782-8, 220pp, hardcover, \$18.95. (SF novel, first published in the UK, 1990; reviewed by John Clute in *Interzone* 46.) 16th December.

This issue's  
'Small Ads' appear  
on page 56.

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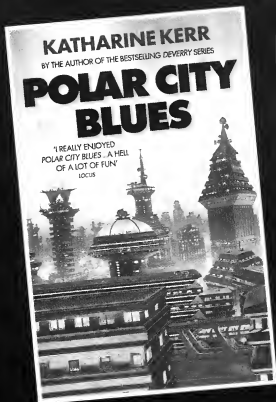
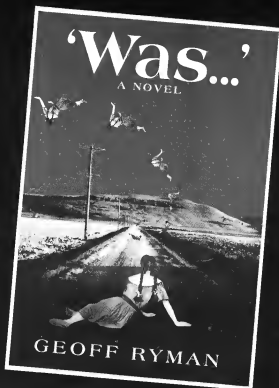
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